# NEW ACQUISITIONS

SPRING 2025

# JACARANDA

# JACARANDA

ART AND ANTIQUES FROM AFRICA, OCEANIA AND THE AMERICAS

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# NEW ACQUISITIONS

## SPRING 2025

We are pleased to present our catalog of *New Acquisitions – Spring 2025*.

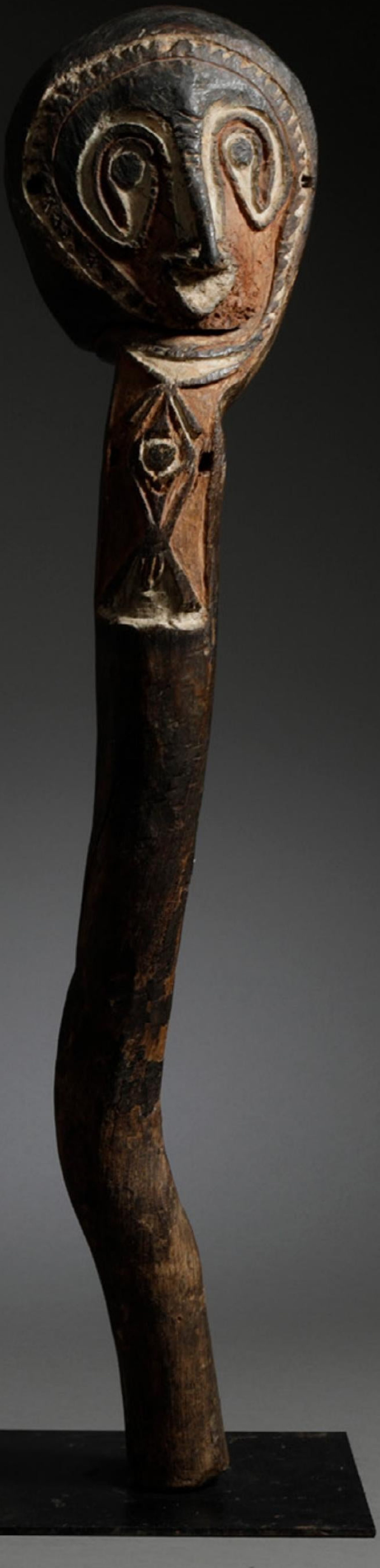
Our online exhibition comprises 25 pieces from around the world. A highlight is a magnificent Old Bering Sea harpoon counterweight, one of the finest to come to the market in recent years. Also included is an enigmatic Okvik female figure pendant, reminiscent of archaic Paleolithic 'Venus' figures.

From the Roy and Sophie Sieber collection, we are proud to offer a rare and early Imunu figure from the Papuan Gulf. The Siebers acquired the piece from Julius Carlebach in the 1950's, who in turn acquired it from Countess Ingeborg de Beausacq and before that, George Craig.

From Africa, we are offering a fine collection of magnificent gold objects from a distinguished private collection, including two exceptional Asante royal sword ornaments. We also have a rare *Gbetu* helmet mask with two beautiful faces. From South Africa, we have obtained one of the finest zoomorphic snuff containers in private hands – these rare objects date to the 3rd quarter of the 19th century.

We are always excited by the discovery of new objects from various cultures and hope you will enjoy this eclectic selection.

*Dori & Daniel Rootenberg*
NEW YORK CITY, APRIL 2025



1

# SPIRIT FIGURE *IMUNU*

PAPUAN GULF, NEW GUINEA

19th century
Wood, natural pigments
Height: 41 in, 104 cm

PROVENANCE

George Craig (1930–2024)
Ingeborg de Beausacq (1910–2003)
Julius Carlebach (1909–1964)
Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

PUBLICATION HISTORY

*Art of The Sepik River and The Papuan Gulf: An Exhibition of New Guinea Art* by Marilyn Hunt-Nishi and Judith Marie Perani. Color plate No 48.

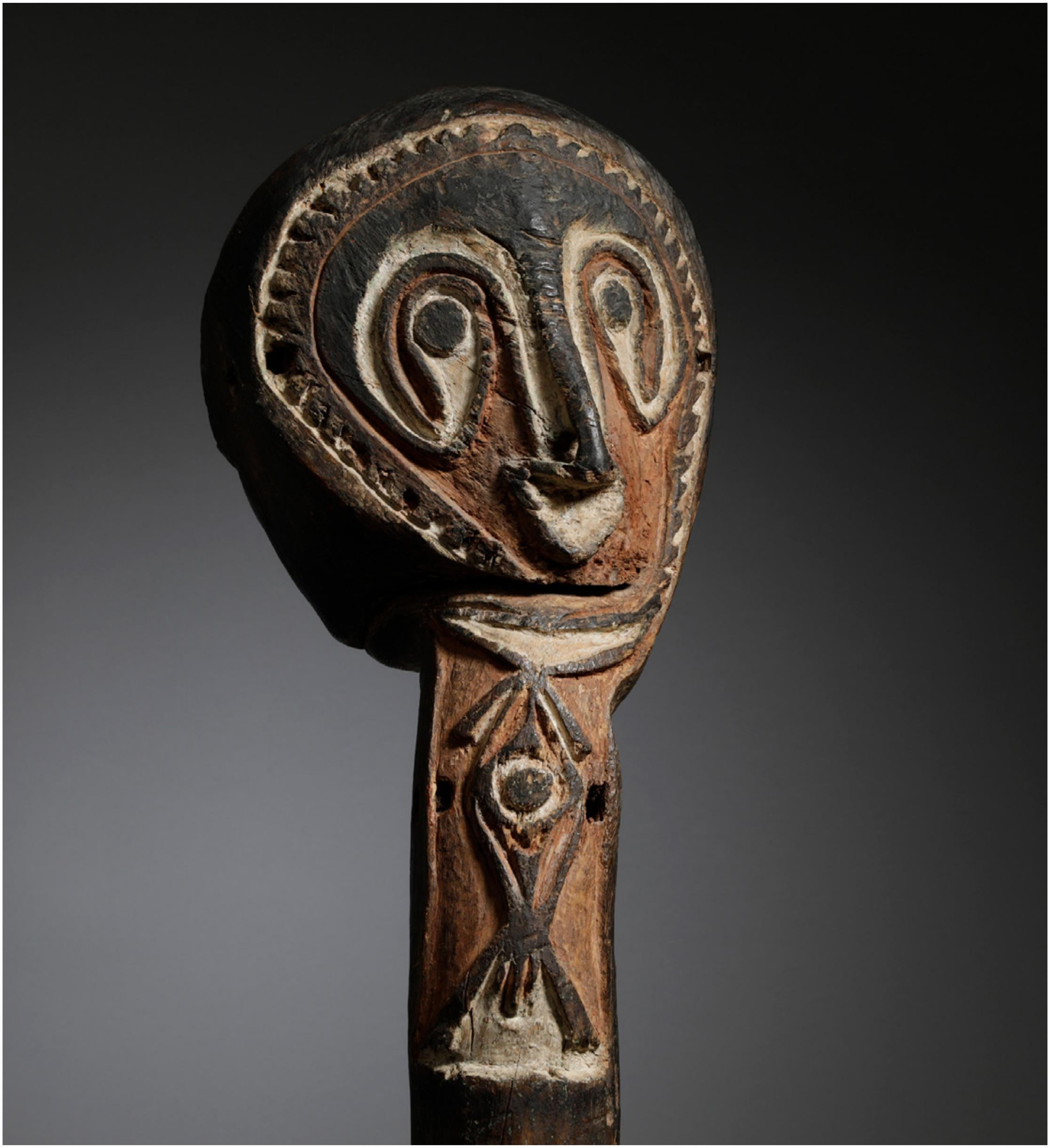
EXHIBITION HISTORY

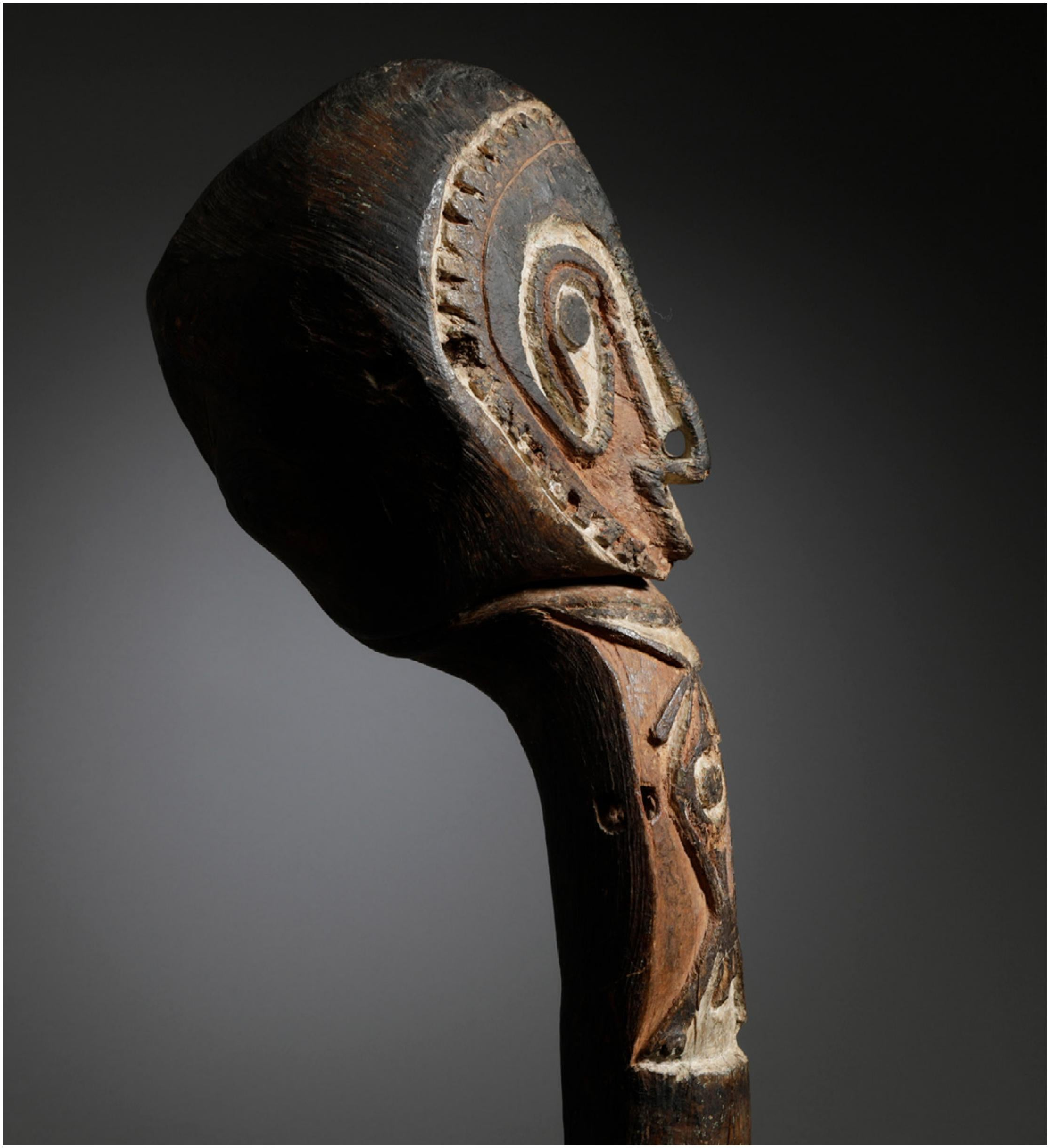
Trisolini Gallery of Ohio University, Athens, Ohio May4 – June 13, 1987
Parkersburg Art Center, Parkersburg, West Virginia
August 1 – October 3, 1987
Kent State University School of Art Gallery, Kent, Ohio.
November 16 – December 11, 1987
The May Weber Museum of Cultural Arts, Chicago, Illinois.
February 11 – April 9, 1988

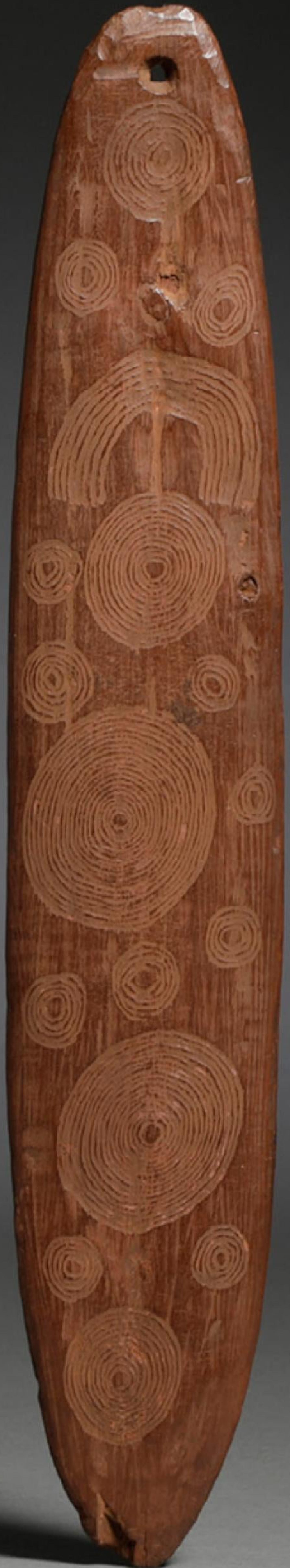
The peoples of the Papuan Gulf have several figural traditions depicting and channeling the powers of ancestral spirits known as *imunu*. These spirits inhabit specific features of the local landscape, such as rivers, swamps, or mountains, and are deeply linked to the tribe. The figures are kept in clan shrines in large men's houses along with other power objects, and serve to aid, protect and guide the community.

The term *imunu* – possibly an onomatopoeia referencing the sound of thunder or the whirling of bullroarers – is also used to indicate a semi-abstract concept of 'vital strength' or 'vital principle,' a living essence that defines individuality. A special subset of Papuan figures that fully embodies this concept, called *kakame*, are carved opportunistically from naturally shaped segments of mangrove trees. After receiving a dream, a sculptor would trek into a mangrove forest and find roots or branches that resembled the forms of the spirits – male or female – he had dreamt, transforming it, by selection and perception as much as anything, into a work of art. The carving of these figures is minimal and selective, preserving the natural shape of the wood, typically with only a face added. As such, they often possess an uncanny feeling of motion and spontaneity, a tint of personality and willfulness that originates outside the control of the artist.

This is an important and early example of a 'found' spirit figure, dating to the nineteenth century. It is a limbless, stone-carved representation in which a tapering suggestion of a body trails from a large head cut from a knot of wood. Evoking both a living face and a skull, the visage is carved in relief, similar in technique to the spirit boards and *bioma* figures also found in men's house shrines. Dense, raised designs fill out the face and neck in white, black and red ochre, and the staring eyes, placed at the center of curling semi-spirals, hold an entrancing power.







2

# BULLROARER

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES, AUSTRALIA

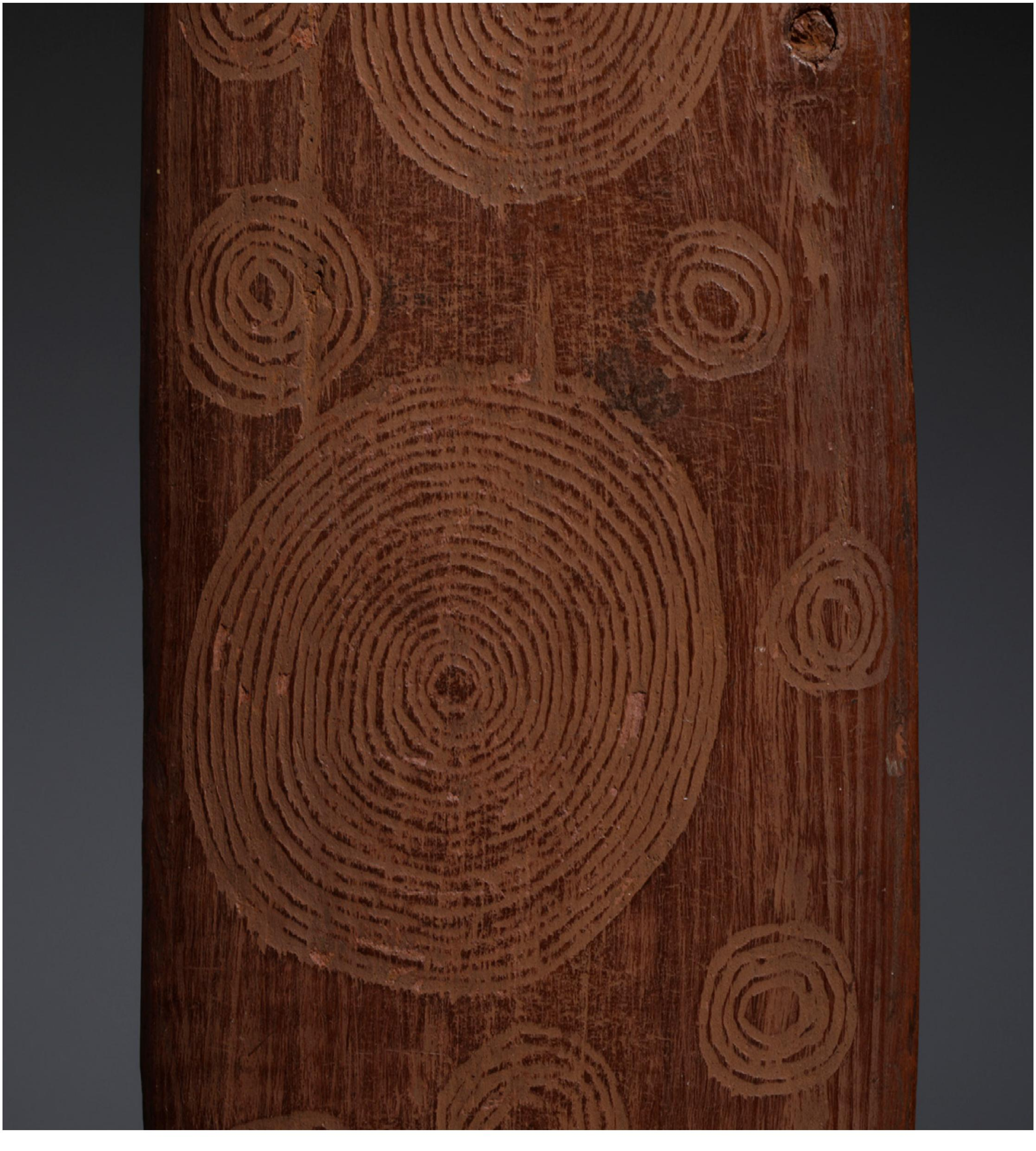
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood
Height: 12 ½ in, 32 cm

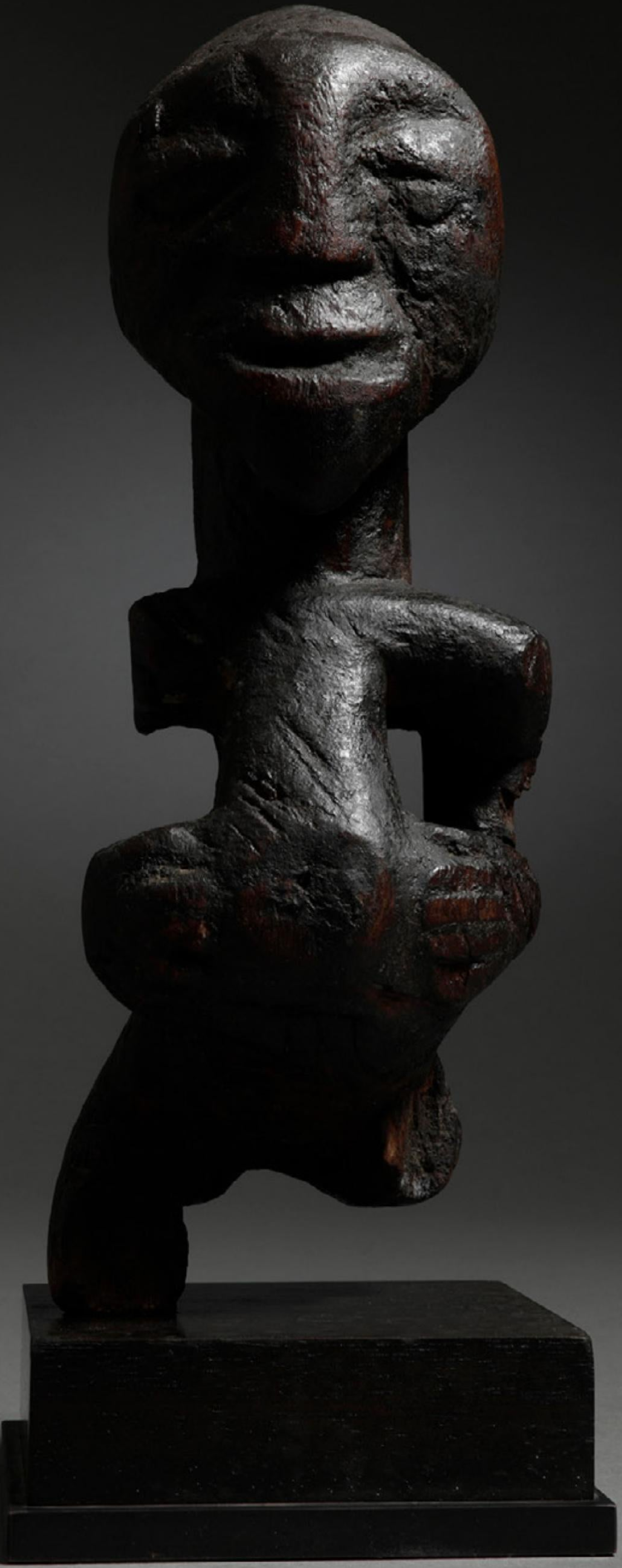
PROVENANCE

Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

Bullroarers have been used in initiation ceremonies and in burials to ward off evil spirits, and for bad tidings. Bullroarers are considered secret men's business by all or almost all Aboriginal tribal groups, and hence forbidden for women, children, non-initiated men, or outsiders even to hear. They are used in men's initiation ceremonies, and the sound they produce is considered in some indigenous cultures to represent the sound of the Rainbow Serpent. In the cultures of southeastern Australia, the sound of the bullroarer is the voice of Daramulan, and a successful bullroarer can be made only if it has been cut from a tree containing his spirit.

This example features a host of spaced concentric ring motifs; on one side they are varied only with a single arch or rainbow shape, on the other they are joined and connected by sinuous bands recalling rivers, trails, or roots. One side shows a pair of undulating bands while the reverse bears a trio. The uncarved portions of the terra cotta-colored wood are treated with light scoring, and a hole is pierced at one end for attachment to the cord.





3

# MALE FIGURE *NKISI*

SONGYE, DRC

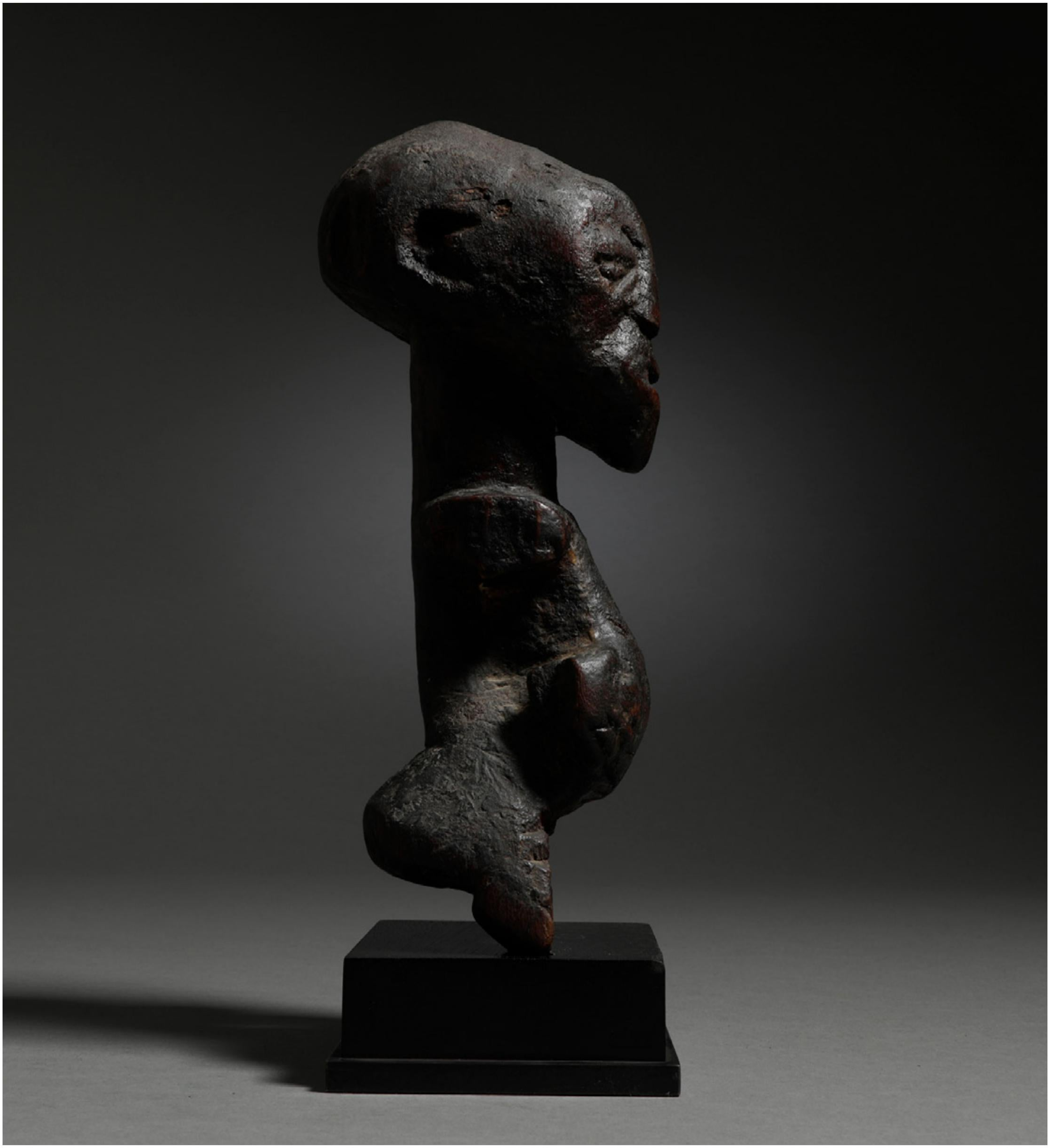
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, palm oil
Height: 9 ½ in, 24 cm

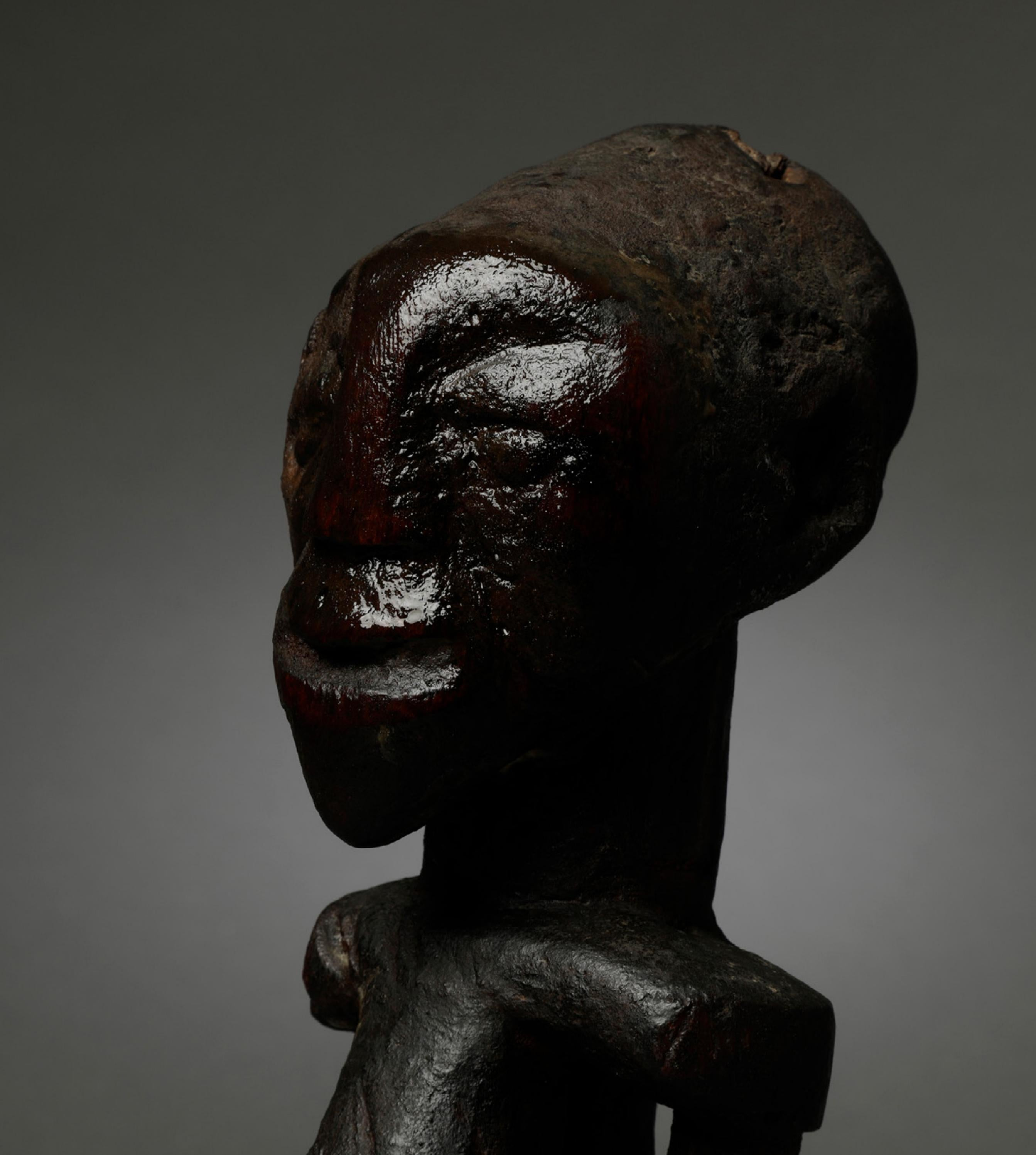
PROVENANCE
Renaud Vanuxem, Paris
Joshua Dimondstein, Los Angeles

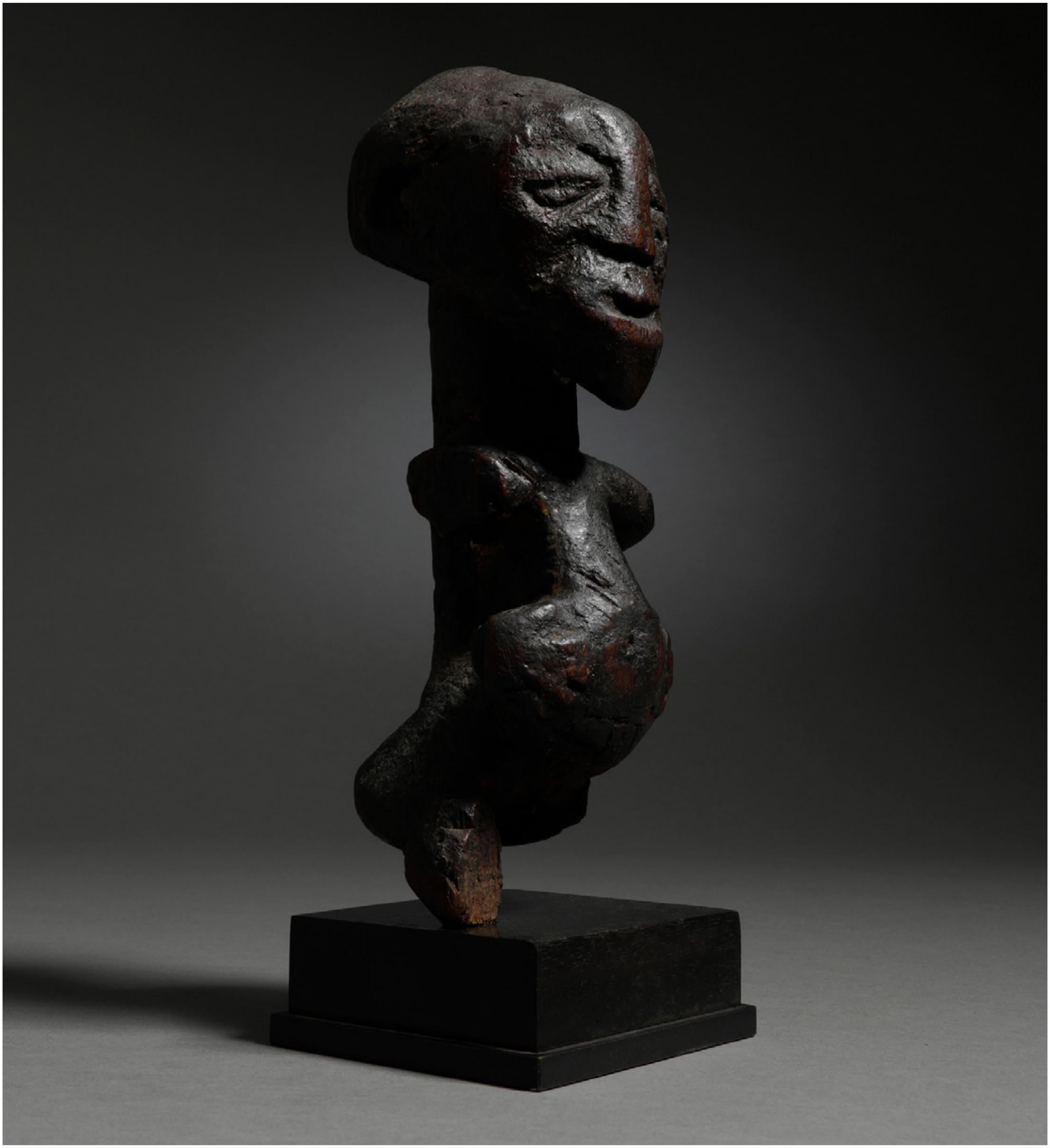
Among some cultures in the Congo Basin, the term *nkisi* or *nkishi* (pl. *minkisi*) refers to a spirit or an object that a spirit inhabits. It is a name most commonly associated with power figures, a major class of carvings that were used to counteract malicious sorcery and promote abundance and well-being. *Minkisi* were created jointly by a specialist carver, who shaped the figure's form, and a ritual practitioner (*nganga*), who would empower and activate the figure with a magical charge of organic ingredients. The latter was either inserted into a cavity or attached to the body.

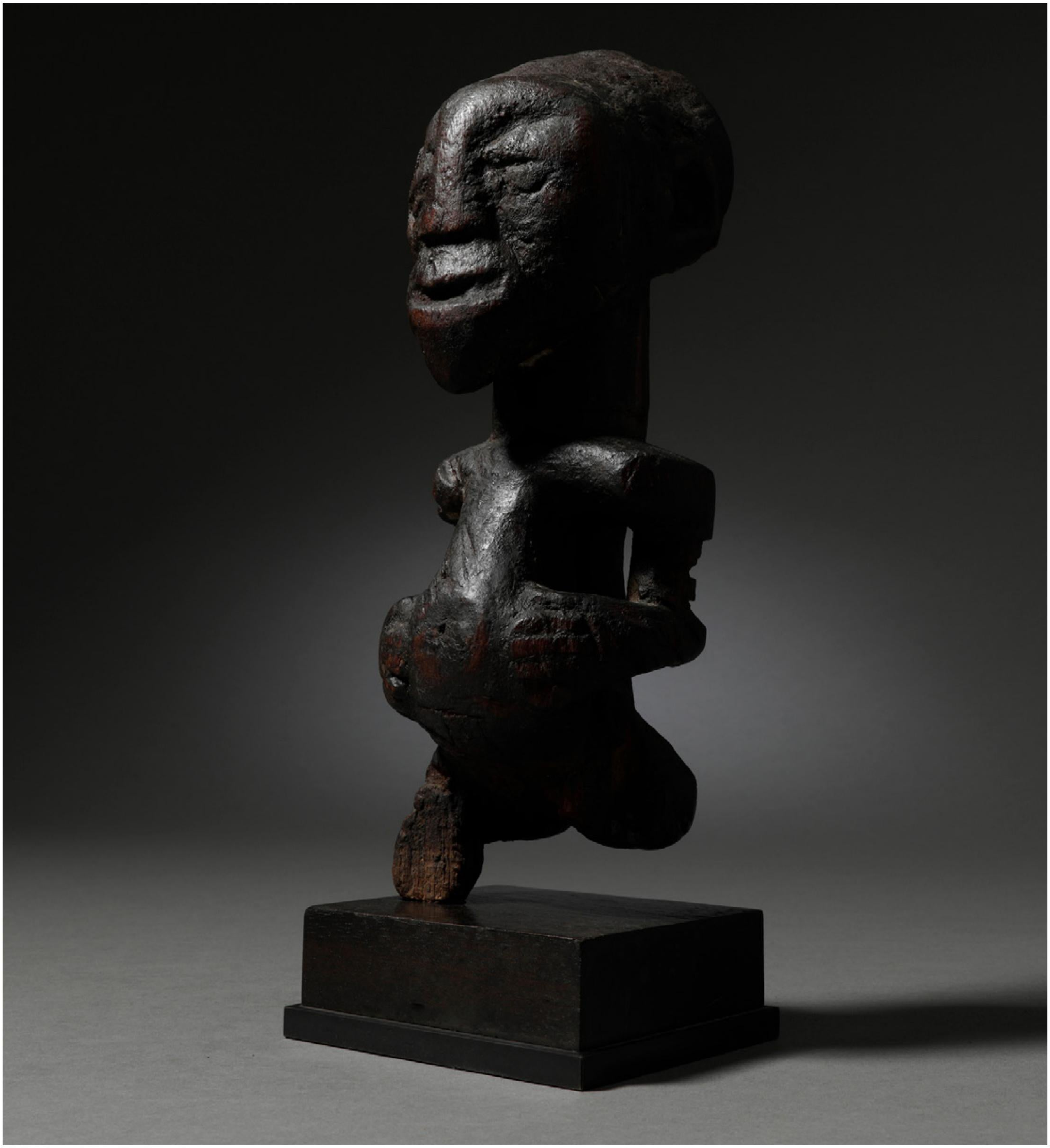
Europeans may have first encountered these objects during expeditions in the region as early as the fifteenth century. In the late 1800s, Christian missionaries who had come among the Songye and Kongo peoples confiscated such 'fetish' objects, as they were often called, and destroyed them as tools of witchcraft and heathenism. Despite their efforts to eradicate these works, many *minkisi* survived and passed into collections to be appreciated and studied by future generations.

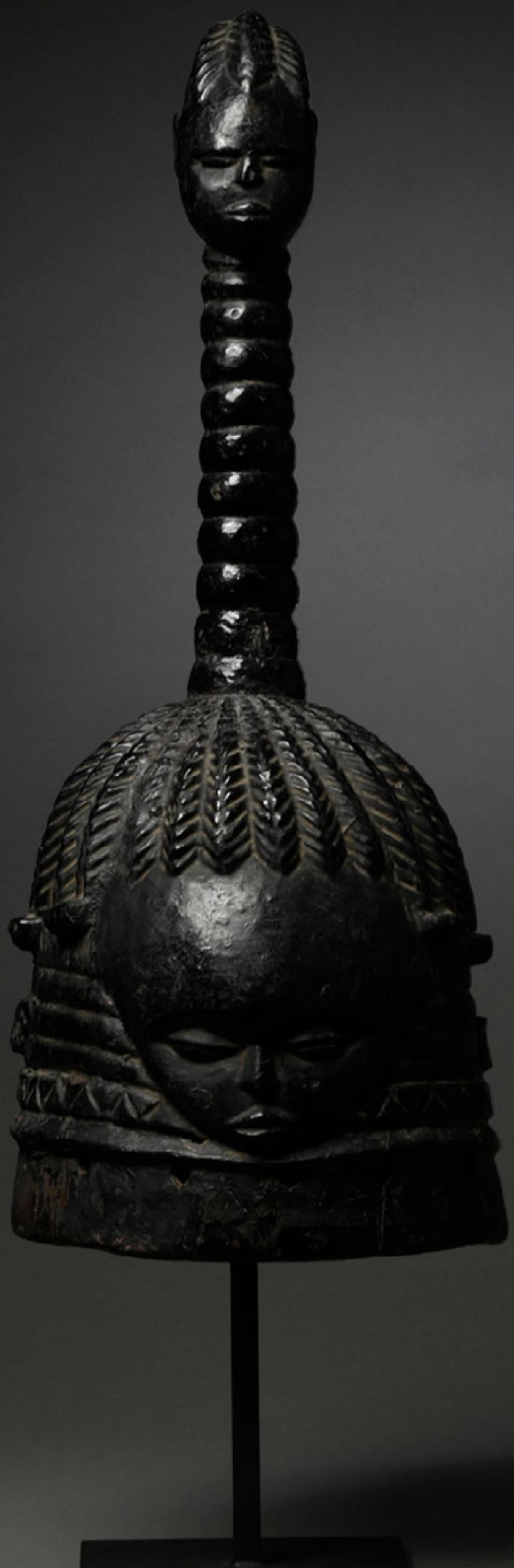
The dark, textured and almost leathery patina of this *nkisi*, as well as the figure's fragmentary nature, speak to a rich and perhaps tumultuous lifetime of use. Heavy lids and a benevolent expression give the face quite a naturalistic impression, one only enhanced by the organic detail of the surface, which suggests rough and aged skin and a surface which is deeply coated in a ritual covering of palm oil. The figure stands in a classic pose with bent arms, its hands resting on a bulging abdomen, where magical charges are often found.











4

# HELMET MASK *GBETU*

GOLA-MENDE, LIBERIA/SIERRA LEONE

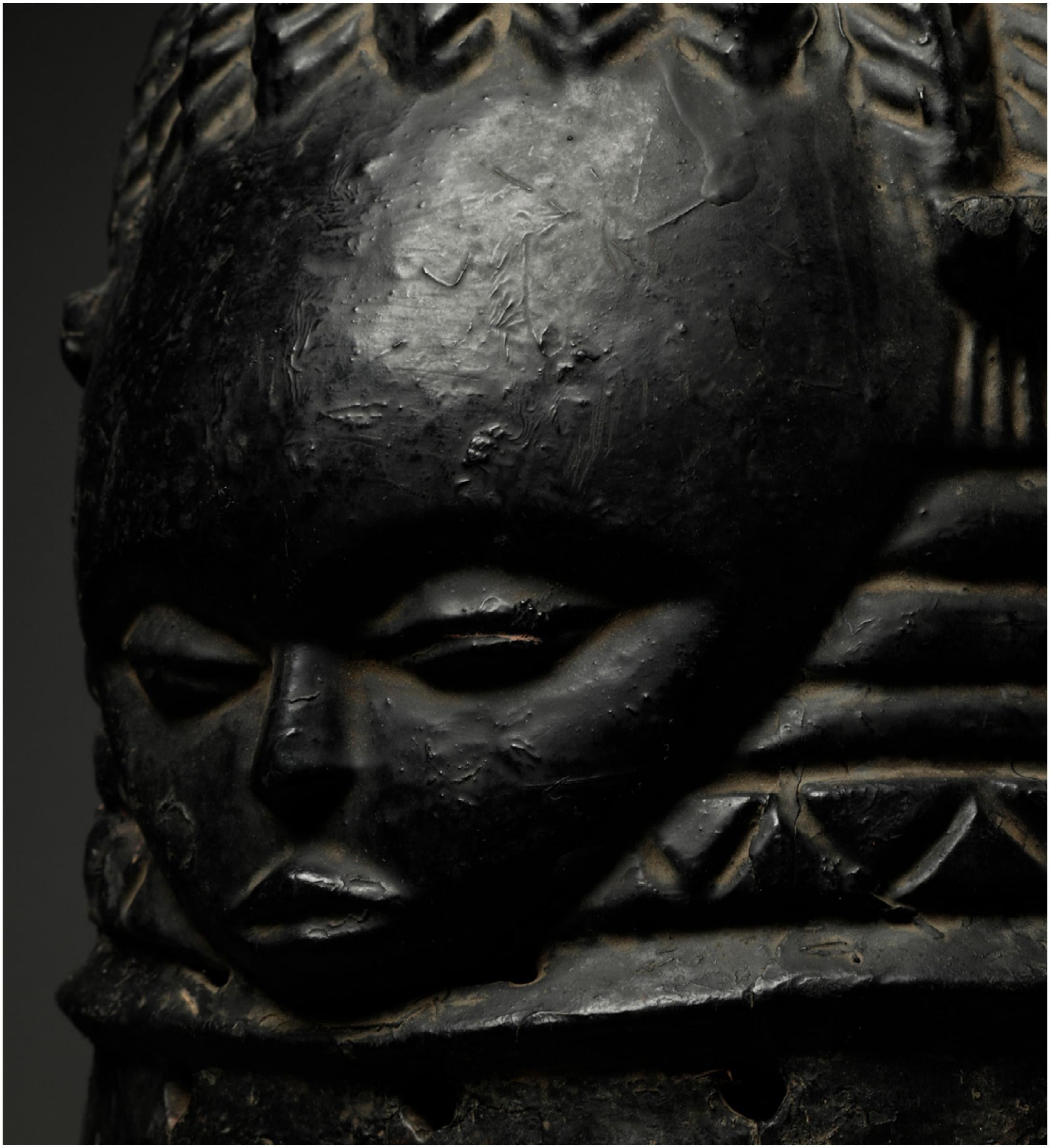
First half of 20th century
Wood
Height: 22 in, 56 cm

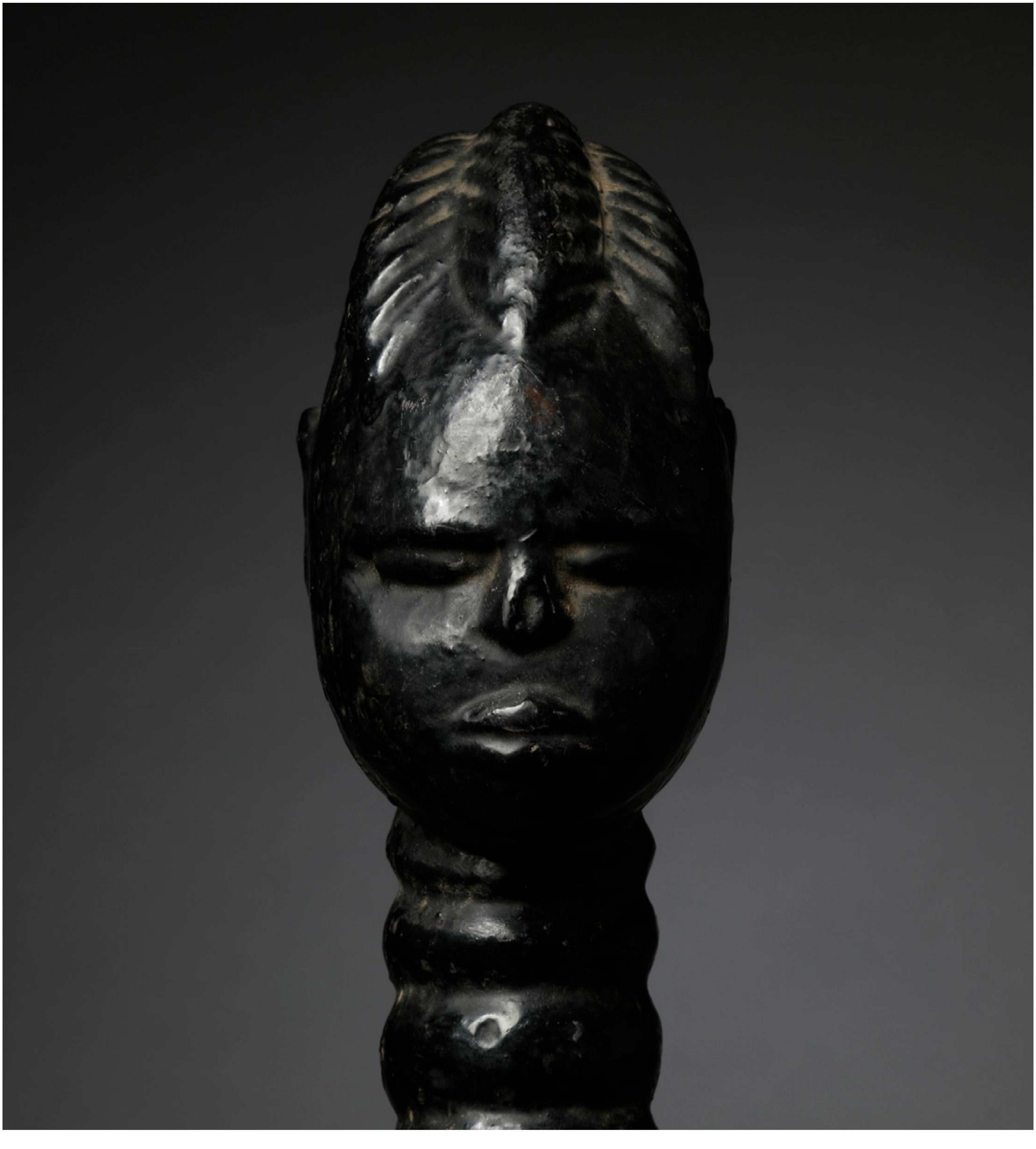
PROVENANCE
Private collection

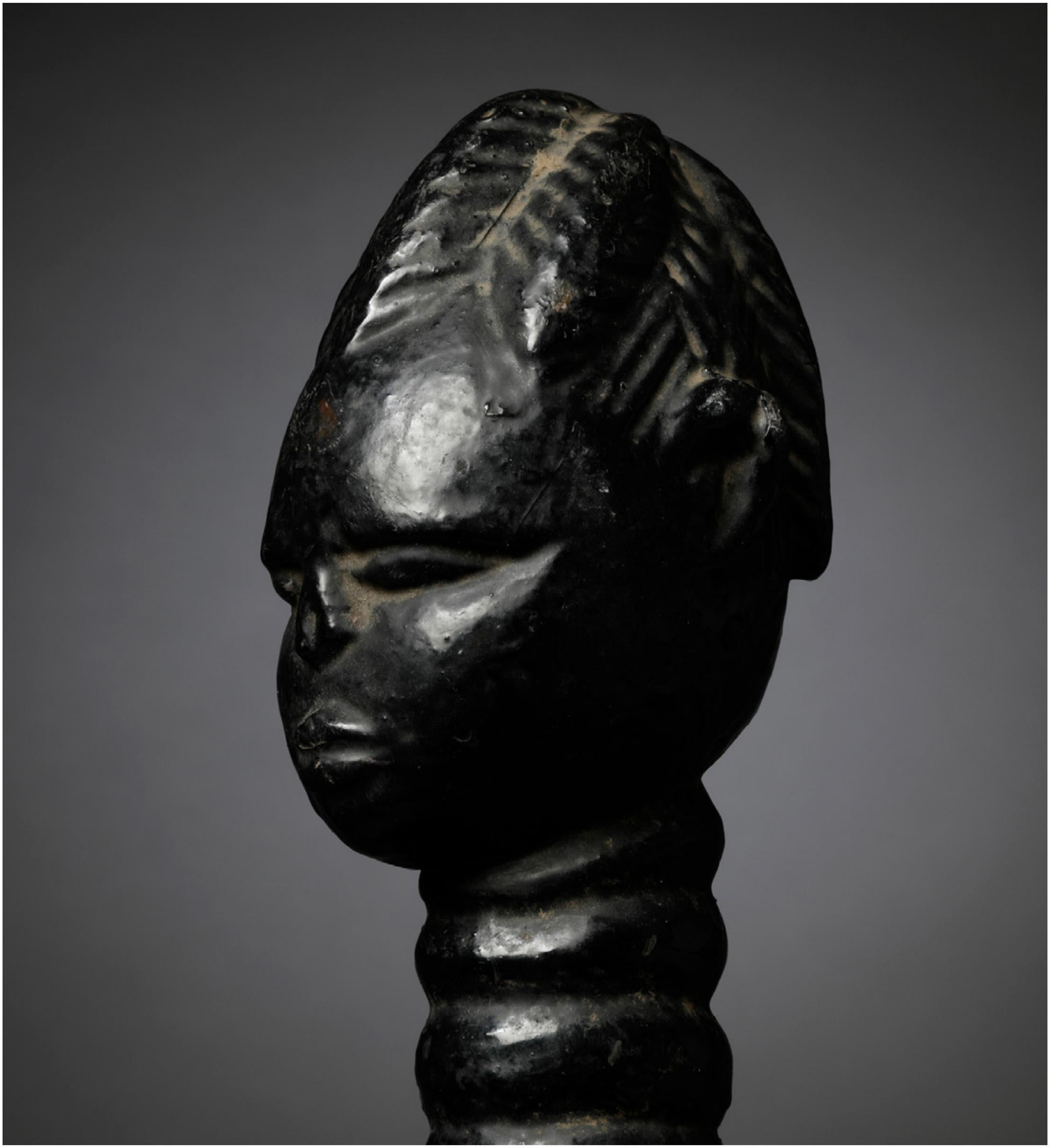
The face and ringed neck of this helmet mask is most often associated with Mende art, sometimes leading to an erroneous identification as a woman's mask (*sowei*) for the Sande society. It is, however, a mask used by male members of the Poro society, known as *borwu* among the Vai and *gbetu* among the Gola. Both names mean 'long neck,' referring to female beauty ideals of a long and elegant neck as well as soft rings suggesting health and well-being. The elaborate coiffure, with packed rows of dense braids, also indicates a refined woman of social status.

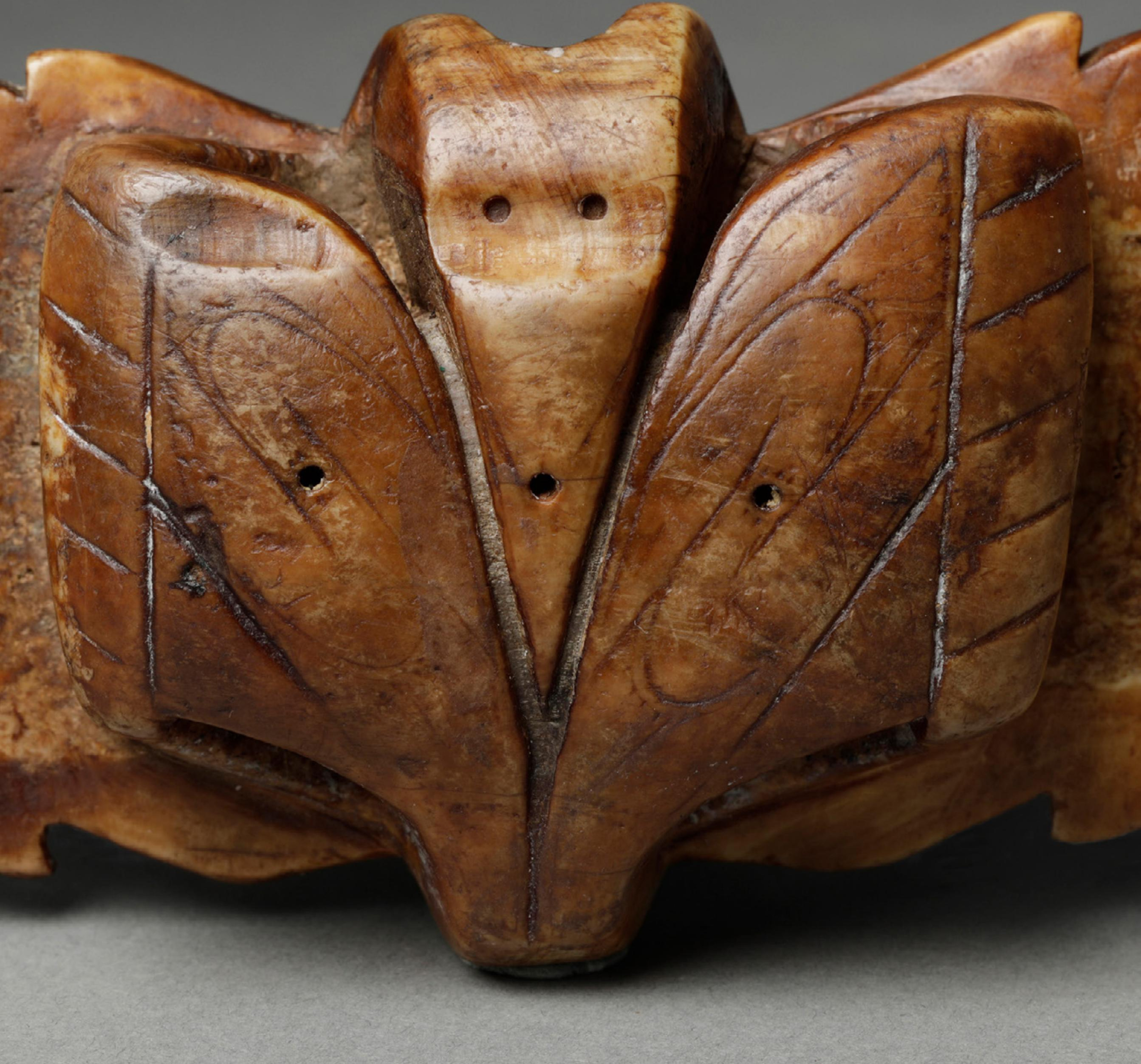
The *gbetu* is an entertainment mask that performs vigorous acrobatic dances, growing very tall and then shrinking low to the ground, turning cartwheels and other tricks while wearing a full raffia costume. In contrast with the strident energy of the dance is the beautiful serenity of the face carved into the bell-shaped helmet, showing a gently domed forehead over calm, semi-closed eyes and diminutive nose and mouth. Peaceful and neotenous, its rounded features are surrounded and framed by the angular, geometric forces of the coiffure and the stacked bands that encircle the head and neck. *Gbetu* masks are rare, and rarer still are *gbetu* with a face on both the finial and the helmet.

In good condition. Repair to base of neck and old repairs to sides of the mask.









5

# HARPOON COUNTERWEIGHT / WINGED OBJECT

OLD BERING SEA CULTURE

400 BC – 1300 AD

Marine ivory

Width: 6 ½ in, 16 ½ cm, Height: 2 ½ in, 6 ½ cm

PROVENANCE

Alaska on Madison

Daniel and Martha Albrecht, Arizona. Dan and Martha Albrecht put together one of the finest collections of Inuit art ever assembled. The majority of their collection was donated to the Heard Museum.

Walker's Auction, Canada

Private collection

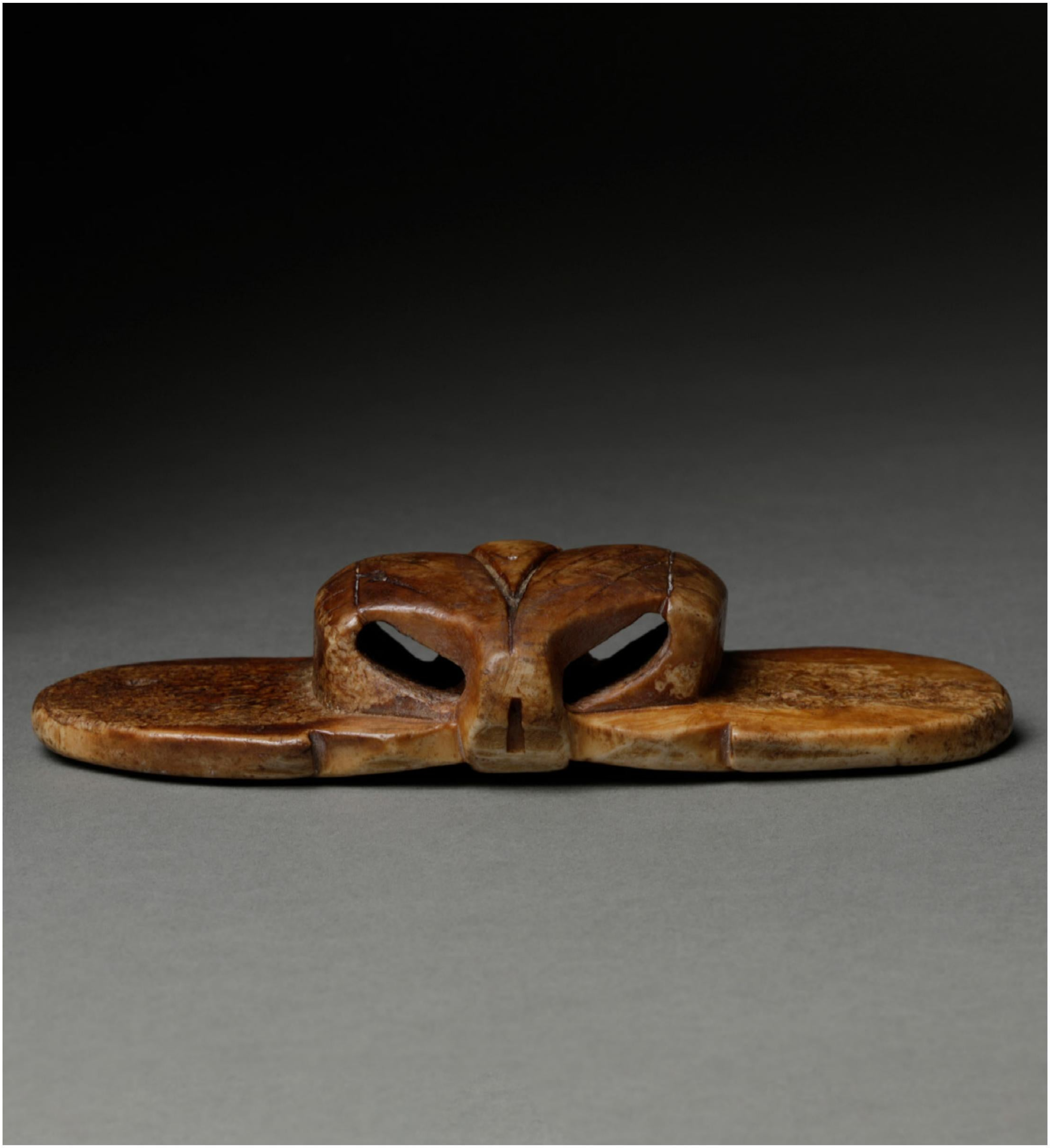
The harpoon has been an essential survival tool for peoples living on both coasts of the Bering Sea for many centuries. Used to hunt large sea game, harpoons were continually developed over countless generations. Around 1500 BC, this engineering process produced the toggling harpoon, which represented a powerful technological innovation for the kayak-borne hunters. Its blade was attached to a small foreshaft that was detachable, designed to separate from the main shaft of the harpoon once it struck the prey. With a length of strong cord connected to the foreshaft, the hunter was able to restrain and tow the animal to shore.

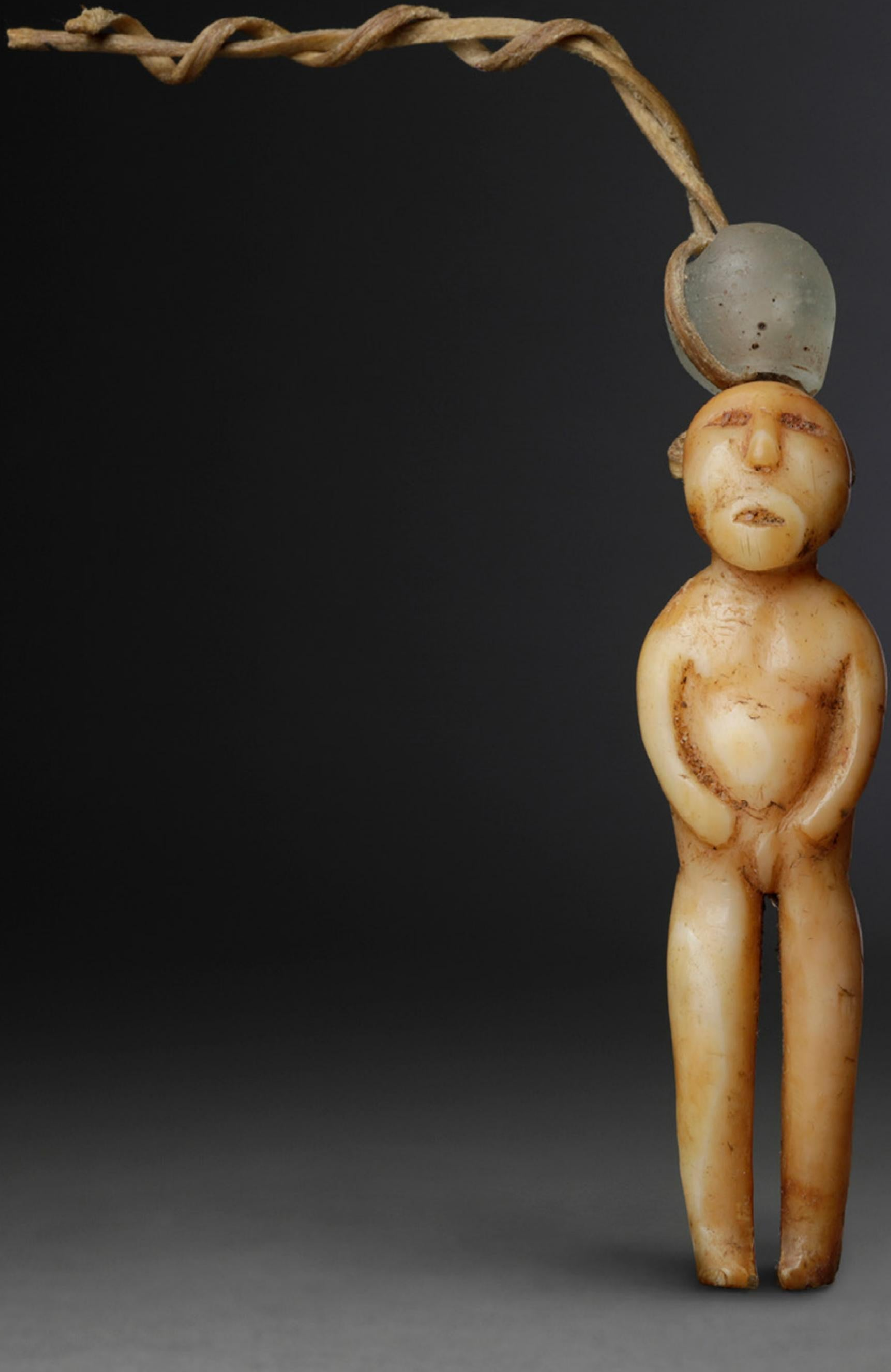
In addition to the toggling head, harpoon makers also designed counterweights that were fitted at the opposite end of the shaft, balancing the harpoon and increasing its efficacy. Counterweights are sometimes referred to as 'winged objects' due to their typical shape, which suggests the silhouette of an abstract bird in flight.

After mastering the function of these harpoons, Arctic artisans began to embellish their forms. Components of toggling harpoons were often carved from walrus ivory and were decorated with elegant and abstract incisions. These items commonly depicted animal spirits and other metaphysical allies that attracted game and empowered the harpoon. By the first half of the first millennium CE, the incised patterns had grown quite sophisticated, often weaving oblique, subtle, and multifaceted images that invite thoughtful interpretation.

The dense and polyiconic surface designs for which Arctic counterweights are known are on full show in this beautiful example. From end to end, the form is covered with a rich embellishment of incisions, segmented into panels that seem to flow and fold into one another. The confident finesse of the design and its sensitive line weights suggest the hand of a master carver. A host of half-seen faces or spirit visages peek out at the viewer from the beautifully aged and parchment-colored surface, hinting at inscrutable metaphors. On the reverse side the designs are continued in the central socket piece, also symmetrically carved and presenting another quasi-biological form that seems to merge intimations of the physical and spiritual.

There are other extant examples of early Old Bering Sea counterweights but this example, with its exceptional carving and beautiful coloring is amongst the finest known examples still in private hands.





6

# STANDING MALE FIGURE WITH GLASS BEAD

THULE CULTURE, MAINLAND ALASKA

Circa 1700 AD

Marine ivory, trade glass bead

Height (figure only): 3 in, 8 cm

PROVENANCE

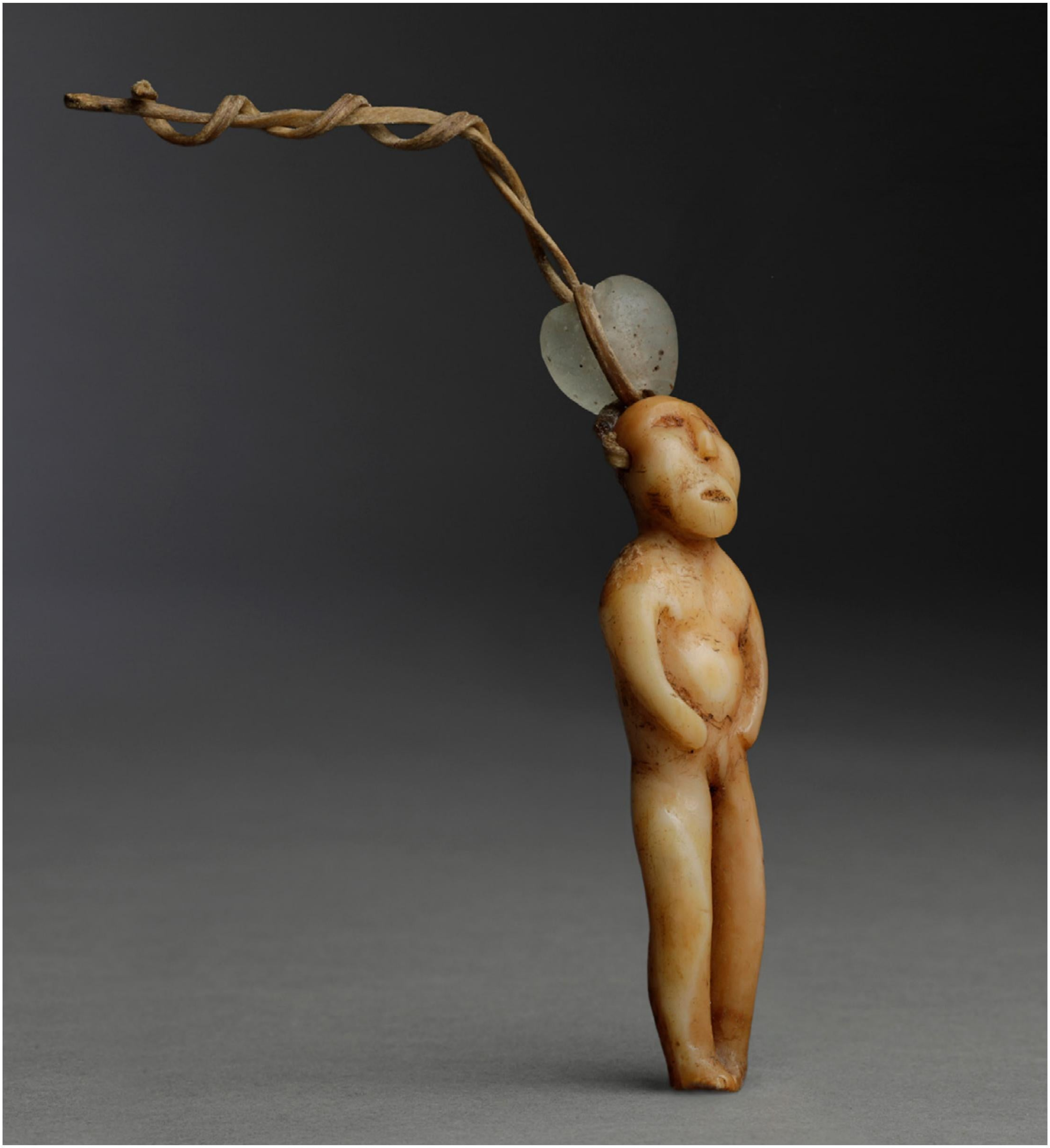
Collected at Port Clarence,Teller, Brevig Mission

Private East Coast collection

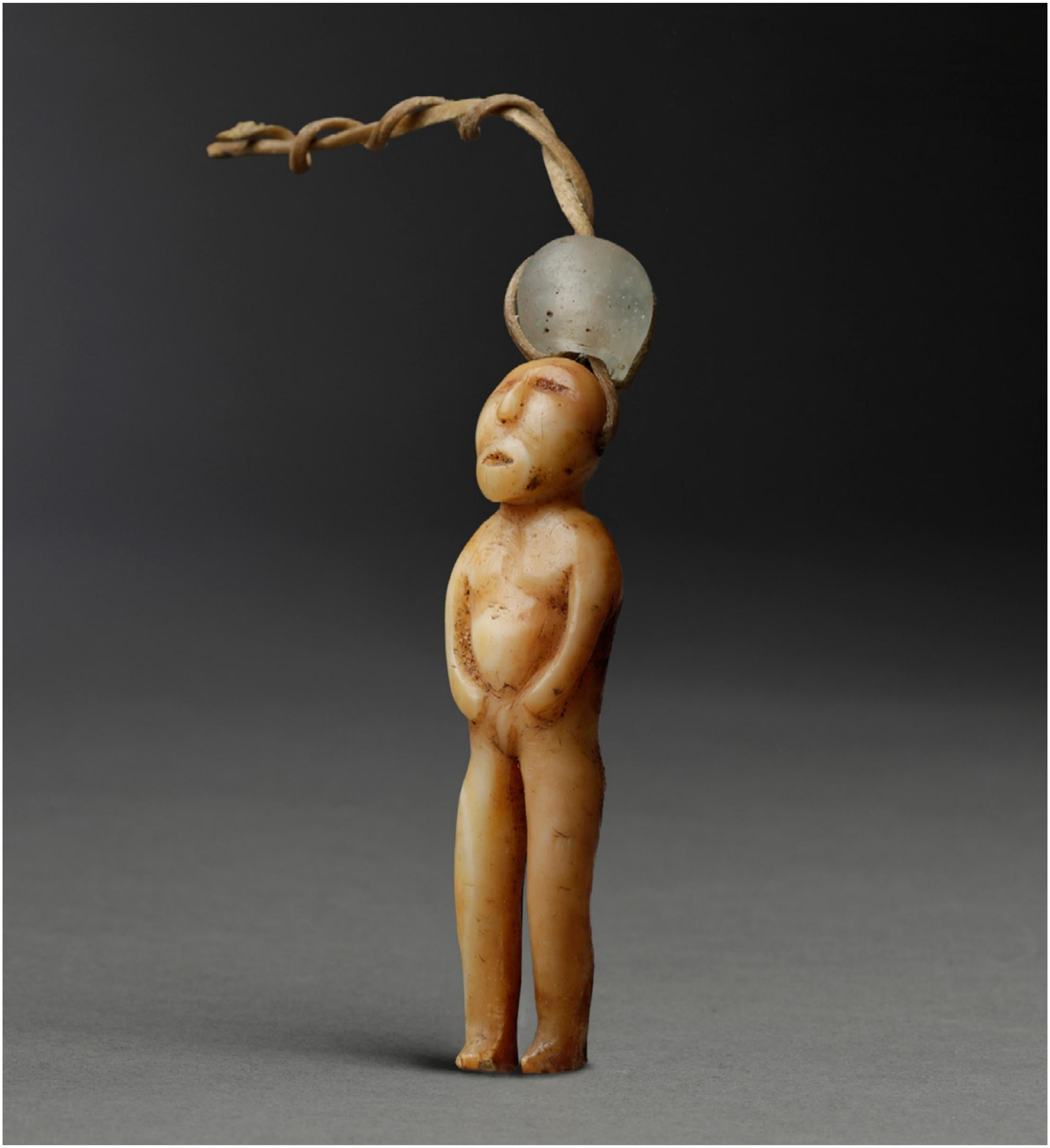
The Thule people, ancestors of the modern Inuit, lived in the Arctic regions of North America from around 1000 to 1600 CE. They were adept at converting means of physical and spiritual sustenance from each of the limited resources available in the Arctic landscape. One of their primary traditions is the carving of marine ivory, from which they created an impressive range of hunting tools as well as more esoteric objects.

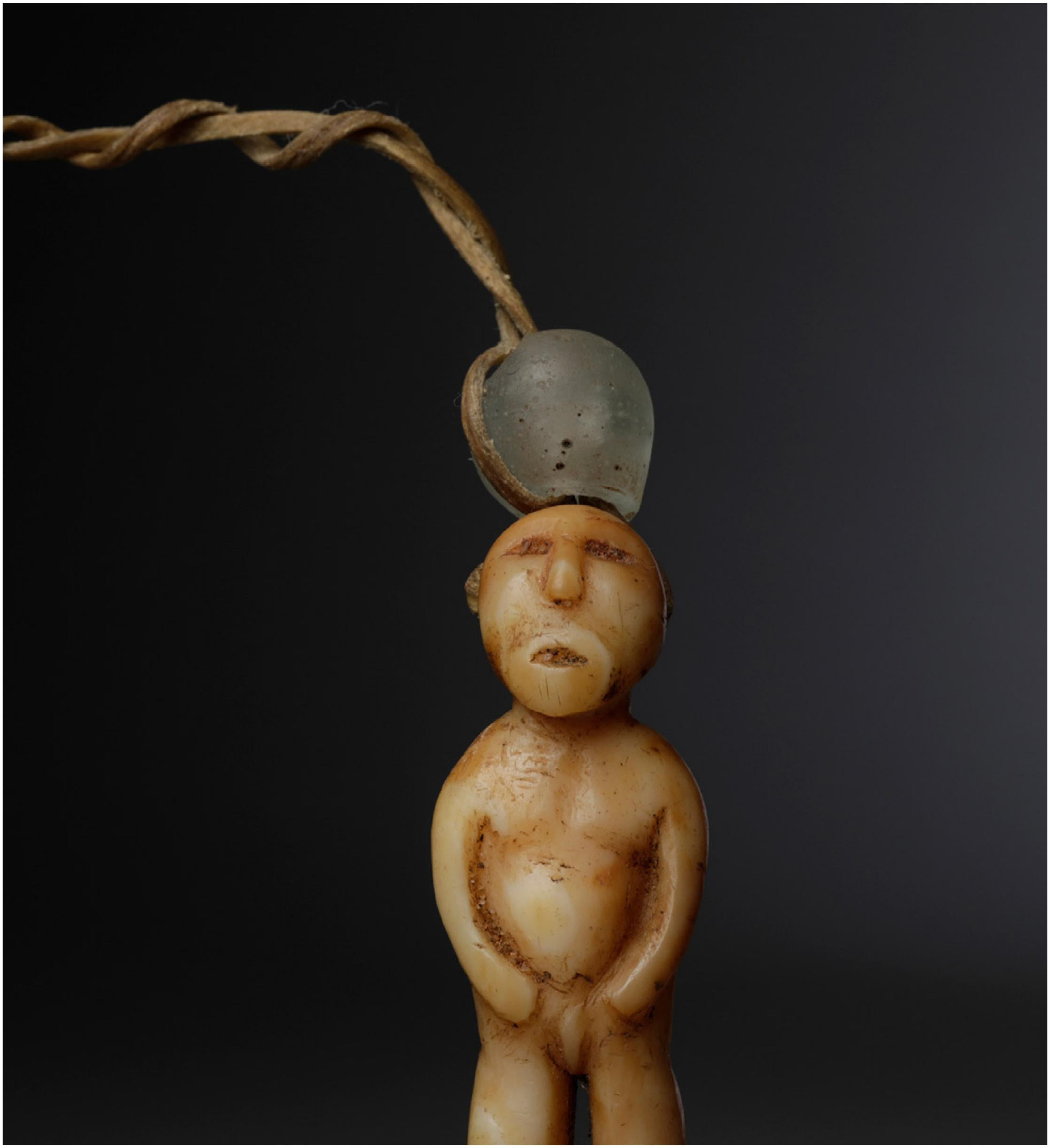
The full breadth of uses and meanings of the ivory images they crafted is not understood by scholars. Animal figurines depicting walruses, seals, birds, and whales certainly served a role as hunting charms, helping bind the destiny of the prey to the hunter. Doll-like human images are more enigmatic, though it is known some were used for social instruction and play, while others were used in shamanic practices and as amulets or effigies.

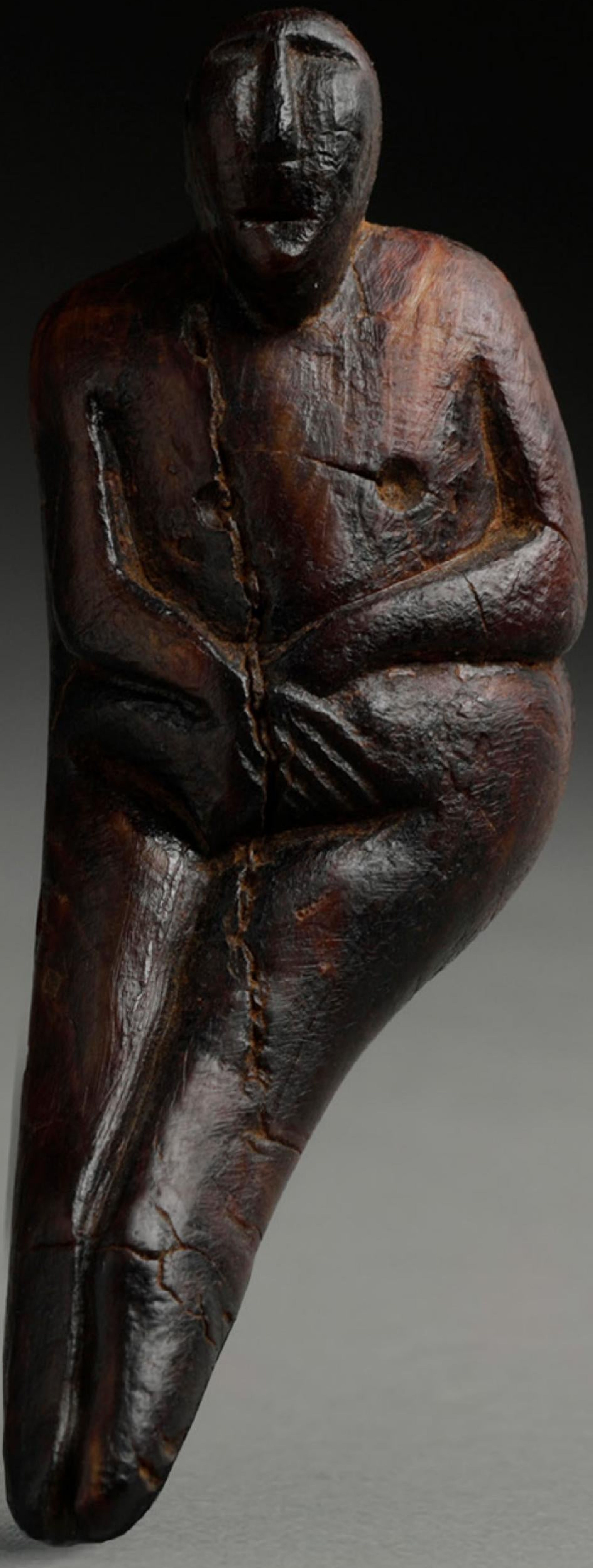
This doll was excavated with a portion of its original hide thong intact, together with an early glass trade bead. Glass beads came into Intuit society in the first wave of contact with Europeans, and by the early years of the eighteenth century were a common trade good. The figure is male and unadorned, with an open-mouthed, entranced expression, arms held against the torso – a posture often seen in carvings of this kind.



STANDING MALE FIGURE WITH GLASS BEAD







7

# PENDANT AMULET IN THE FORM OF A FEMALE

MAINLAND, EARLY THULE

Circa 1000–1300 AD

Marine ivory

Height: 3 ½ in, 9 cm

PROVENANCE

Probably hillside site, Wales, Alaska

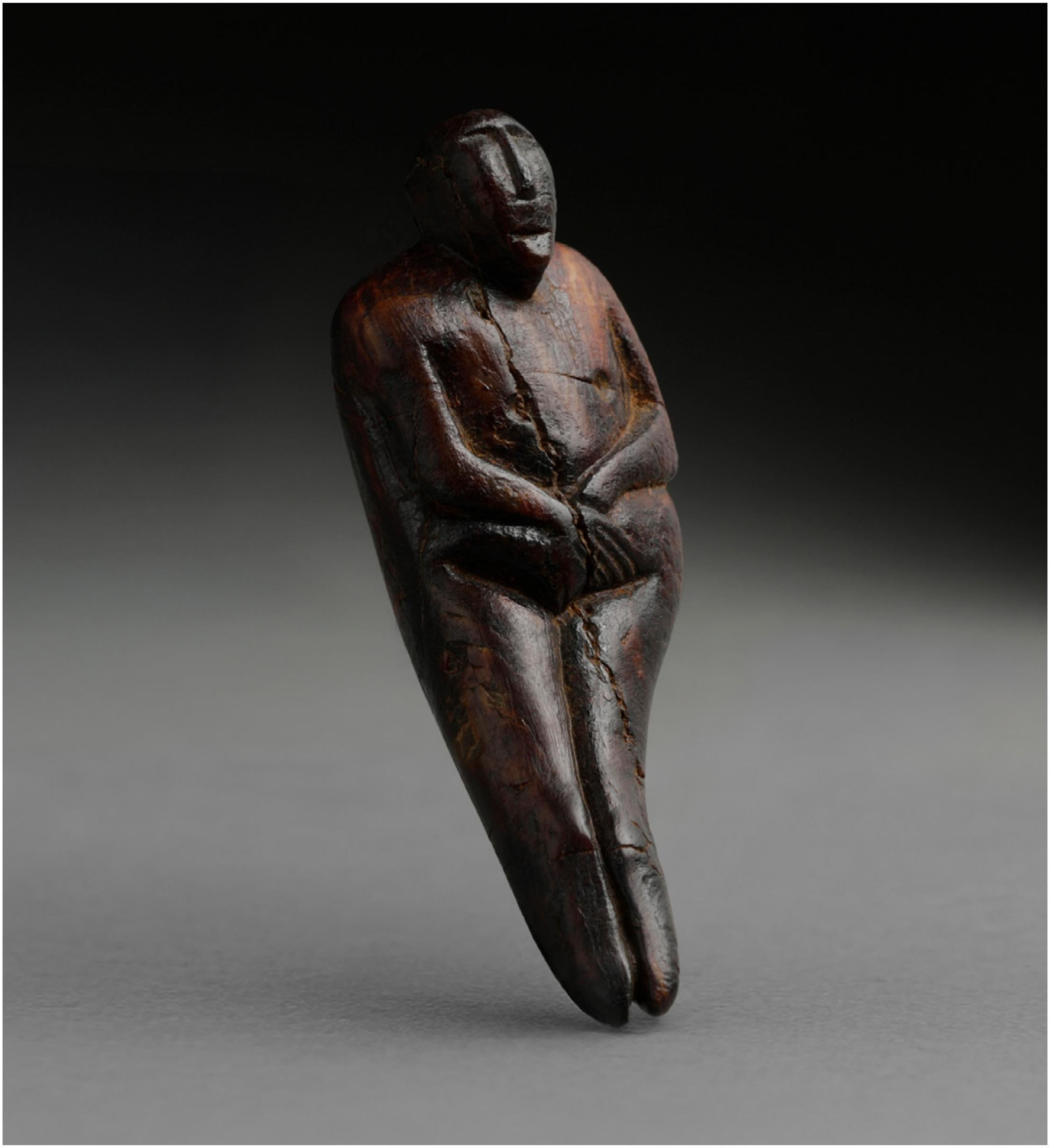
Skinner Auction, 11/2019

Private East Coast, USA collection

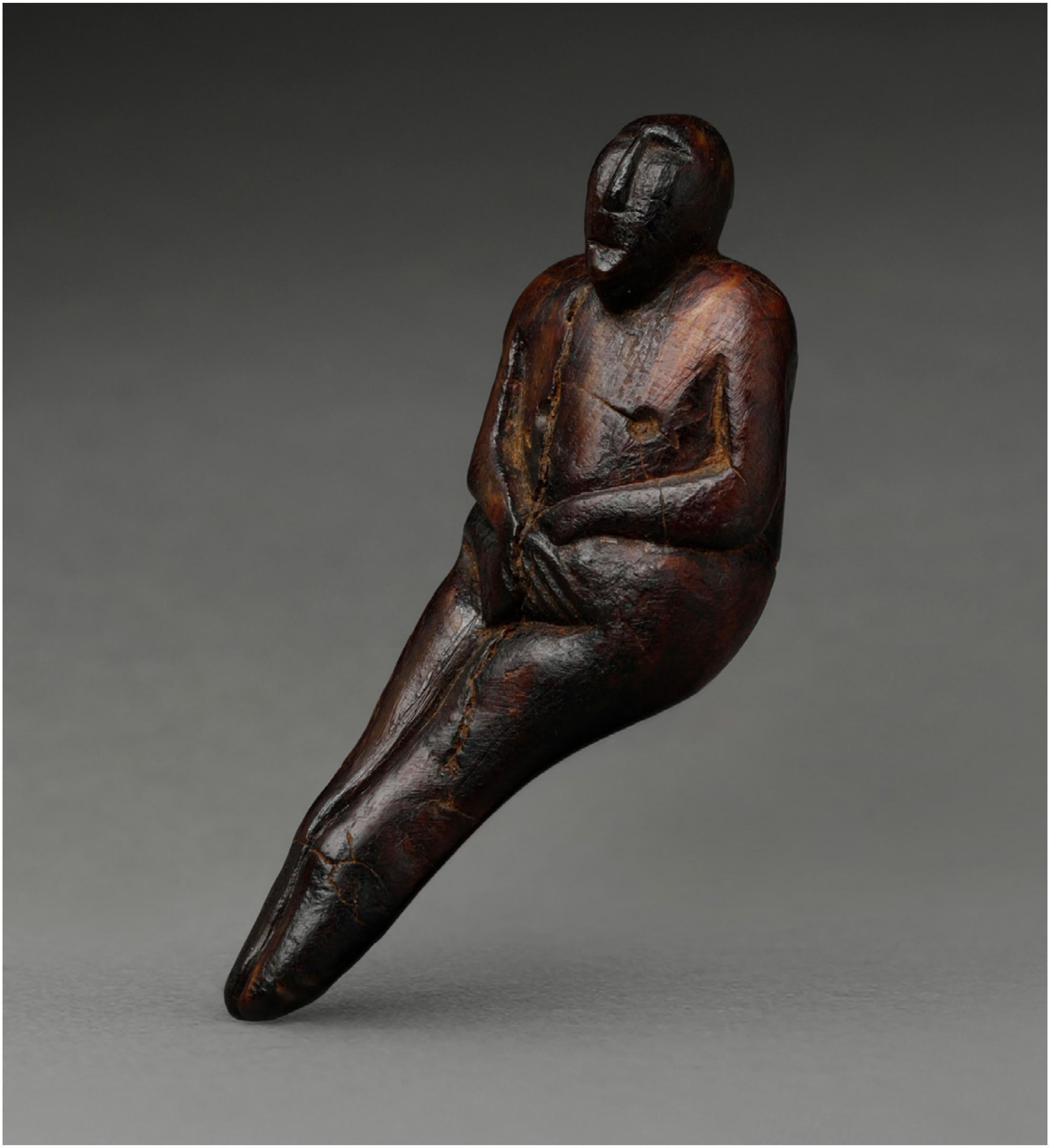
The Thule culture, precursors to the modern Inuit peoples, inhabited the North American Arctic from around 1000 to 1600 CE. Their material culture was crafted largely from the remains of the animals they hunted, and encompassed a wide range of utilitarian and spiritual objects. Among these were a multitude of small figurines carved from ivory and bone, which depicted both humans and animals and sometimes reflected shamanistic themes.

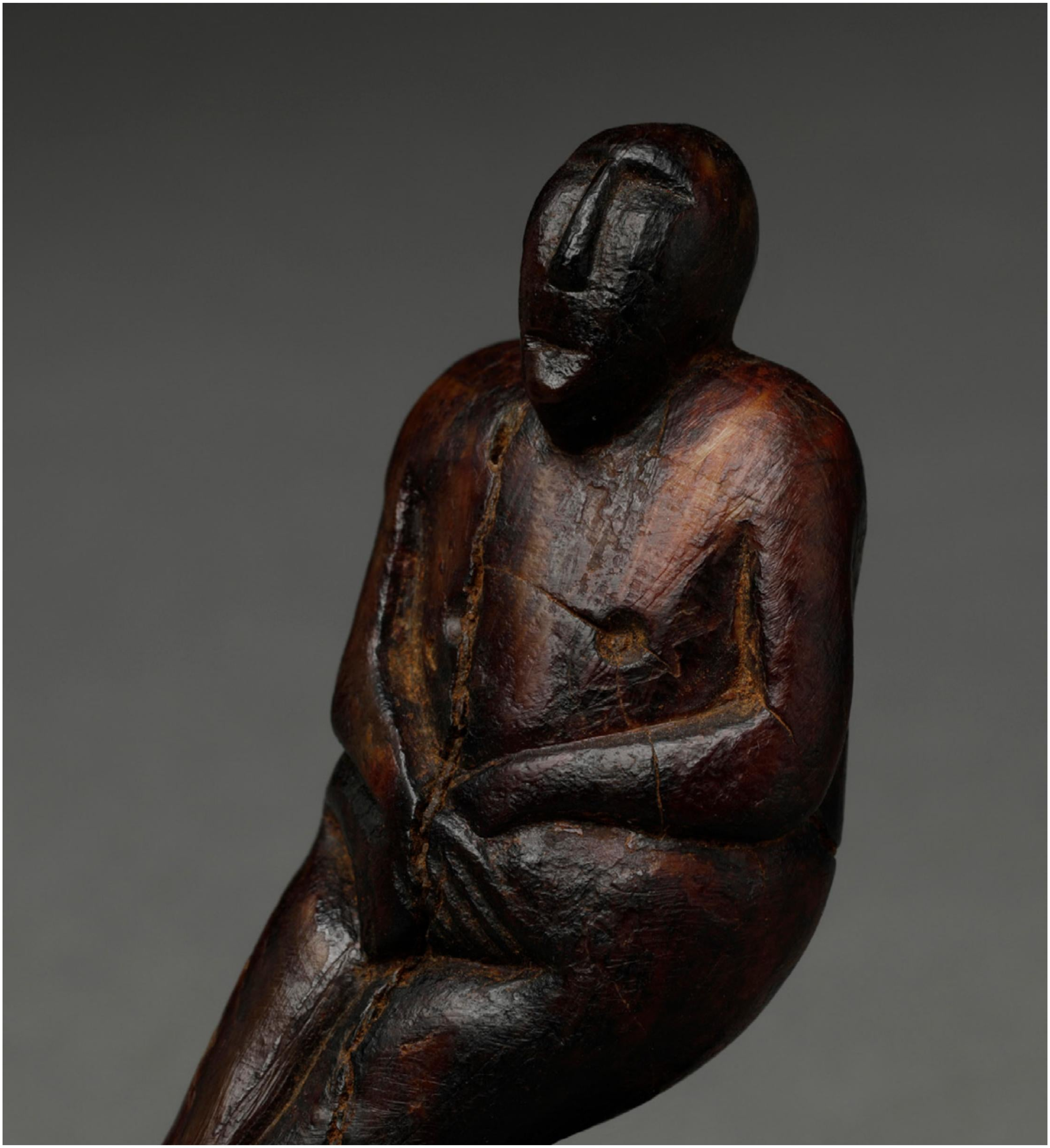
Some human images were worn as pendants, and while the true scope of their use is unknown, they are thought to fit into the broader, documented Arctic tradition of magical effigies and amulet-making. These objects symbolized benevolent spirits and helped to bridge the physical and spiritual realms.

This compelling pendant figure is enigmatic and its symbolism may never be known. In its archaic quality, it resembles Paleolithic 'Venus' figures from Europe. Its thick body and limbs, arms pressed close and crossed against the belly, form a strong, unbroken mass. The posture, with extended legs, is unusual and its meaning is unclear. A doll-like head showing horizontal eyes, long nose, and open mouth sits stoutly on the shoulders. The ancient ivory has aged to a dark, warm brown, lending the figure a leathery hue that deepens its powerfully physical character. This simple, honest and unembellished image, like many Arctic ivory figures, seems to echo with deep feeling.



PENDANT AMULET IN THE FORM OF A FEMALE





## 8

# OIL CONTAINER PLUG IN THE FORM OF A RIGHT WHALE

### PALEO-INUIT CULTURE, ST LAWRENCE ISLAND

Circa 500–1300 AD

Marine ivory

Height: 2 in, 5 cm, Width: 4 in, 10 cm

PROVENANCE

Collected from the old bay site, Gambel, St.Lawrence Island

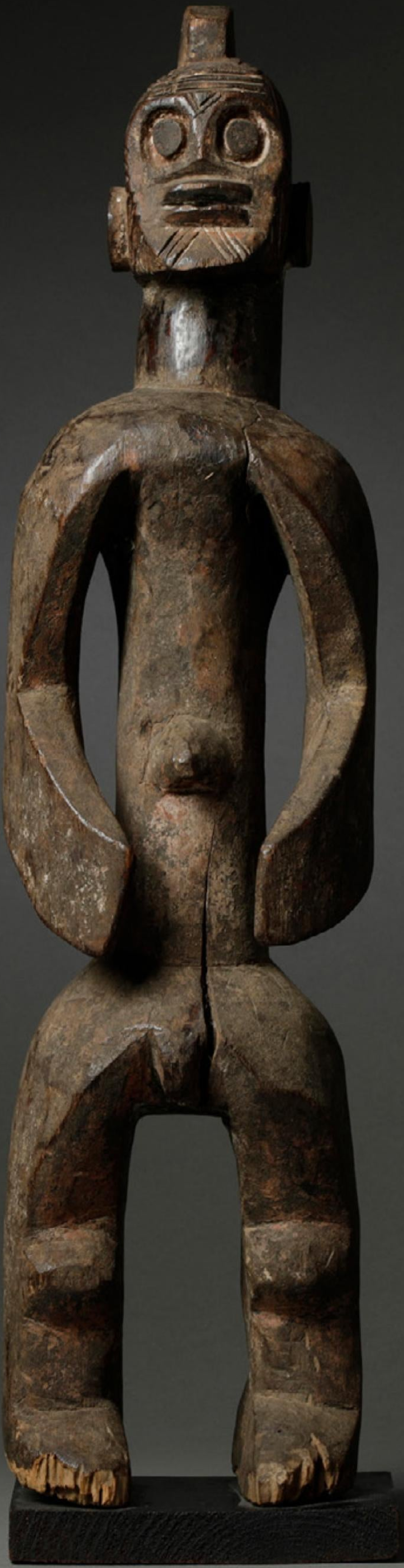
An important private East Coast collection

The epicenter of Paleo-Inuit 'Old Bering Sea' culture was St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, located in the southern Bering Strait. Overlooking the migratory path of walrus, whale, seal, and an uncountable variety of bird species, the island has been inhabited for millennia and contains several important archeological sites. Excavations here have unveiled a rich artistic history stretching far back into prehistoric times, including a marvelous carving tradition executed largely in walrus tusk ivory. Due to the density of the ivory and their centuries-long burial in ice and permafrost, these artifacts survived remarkably well-preserved.

In addition to doll-like figurines and other human depictions, most Paleo-Inuit ivory was carved into intricate, highly decorated animal effigies modeled upon the birds, fish, and mammals living on and near St Lawrence Island. This focus on animal images was not an arbitrary choice but the product of a developed cosmology and a crucial survival dynamic.

Arctic peoples recognized all living beings as possessing a spirit, which they termed *inua*, referring to a human essence and consciousness (*inu-* is the root for 'person,' and Inuit means 'the people.'). *Inua* are the metaphysical foundation of existence, and circulate through new forms and bodies in a process of reincarnation. In this cycle of continual rebirth, it was believed that a hunted animal's spirit would return only to those hunters who properly honored them. In an effort to maintain this crucial relationship, Arctic carvers expended great effort and care upon their hunting implements, expressing their respect through the beauty of the sculpted form. Beautiful tools were an unmistakable tribute to the spirits, both a gift and an irresistible lure.

The carving seen here, which depicts the head of a whale, is similar to a hunter's 'wound plug,' an object that was inserted into a harpoon wound to prevent the total loss of the animal's blood and provided a secure place to lash hauling cords. However, considering the pointed end in this instance is the decorative one, it is more likely a stopper for an oil flask. Animal iconography often points to an item's specific associations, and this stopper or plug likely served in the preservation of whale oil. The head is detailed with traditional linear and 'stitch' incisions, as well as circular indentations, delineating the facial features and additional embellishments. A hole has been drilled widthwise through the head to allow for the attachment of a suspension cord.



9

# STANDING MALE FIGURE

MUMUYE, NIGERIA

First half 20th century
Wood, pigments
Height: 23 in, 58 cm

PROVENANCE

Field collected by Roy Sieber in Benue Valley, Nigeria, 1958
Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Berns (Marla C.), Fardon (Richard), Littlefield Kasfir (Sidney) (ed.), 'Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley', Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, 2011:260, #8.38

Herreman (Frank) & Petridis (Constantine), 'The Human Figure Reinvented: Mumuye Sculpture from Nigeria' in: Tribal Art Magazine, #81, Autumn 2016:134 (fig. 12)

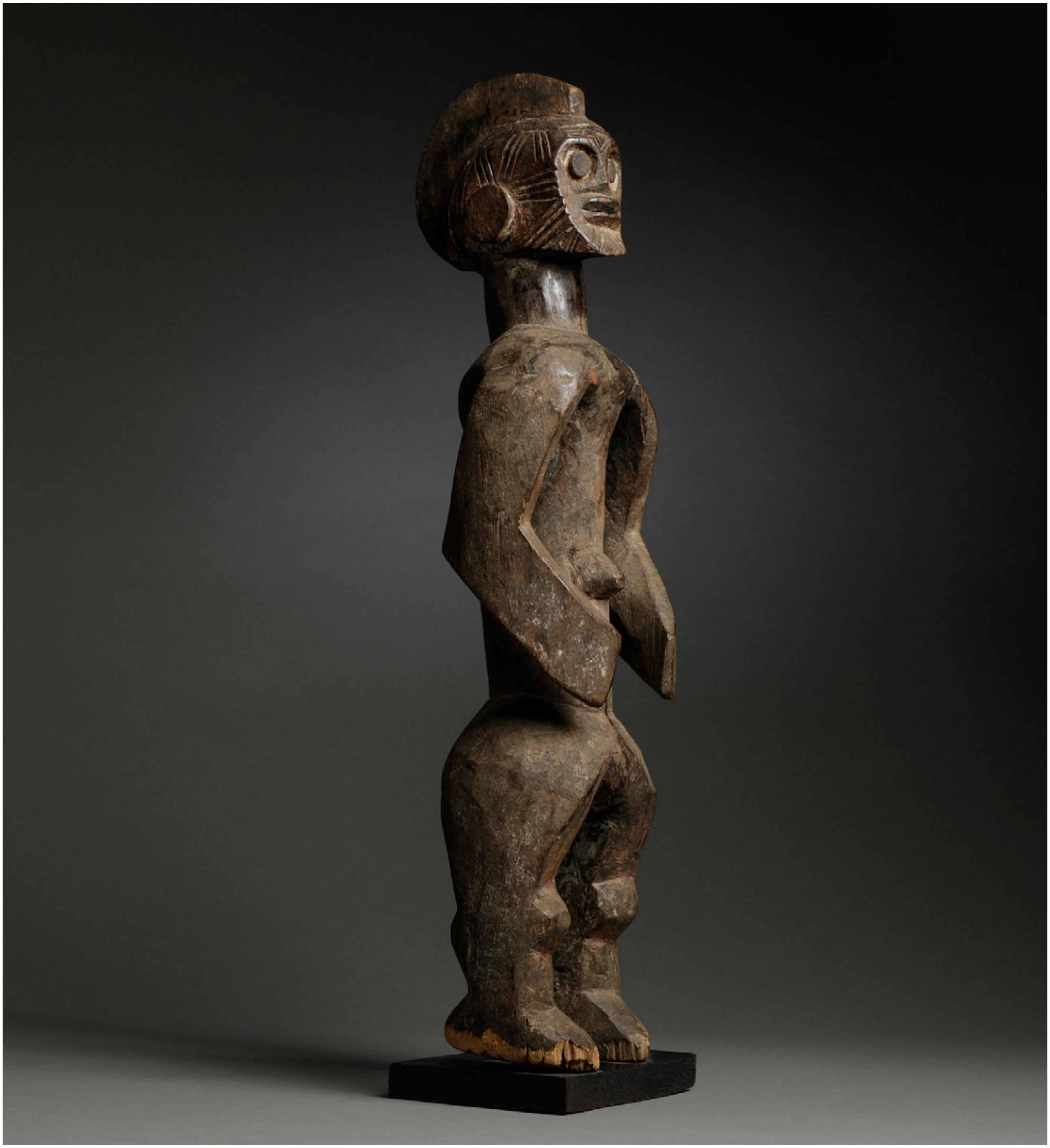
Herreman (Frank), 'Mumuye. Sculpture from Nigeria. The Human Figure Reinvented', Milan: 5 Continents, 2016:37, Plate 2

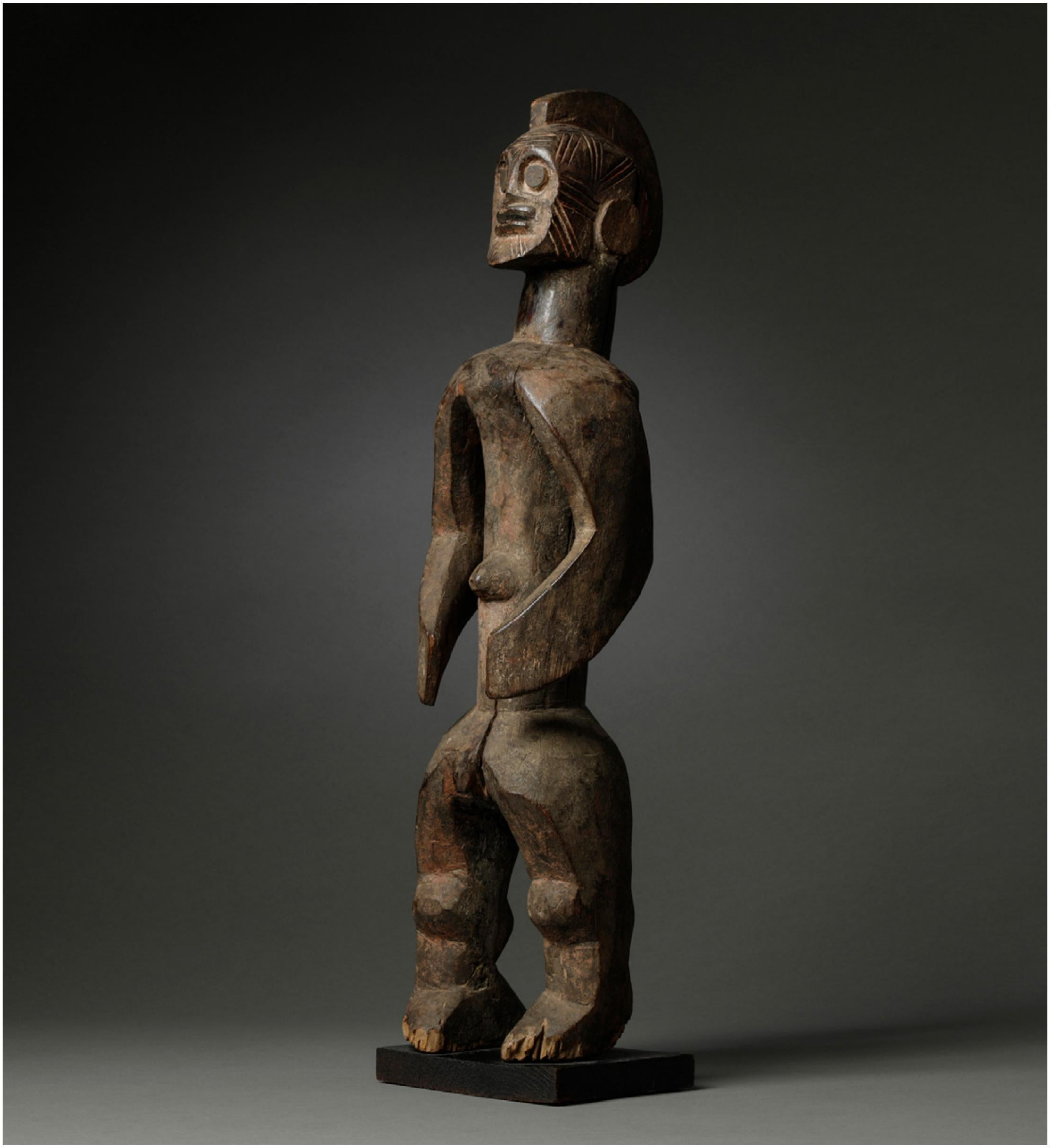
The Mumuye comprise a number of farming groups based in eastern Nigeria, south of the Benue River, living alongside the neighboring Chamba, with whom they share cultural influences. Artistically, the Mumuye are best known for their figural tradition, which stands among the most recognizable in African sculpture.

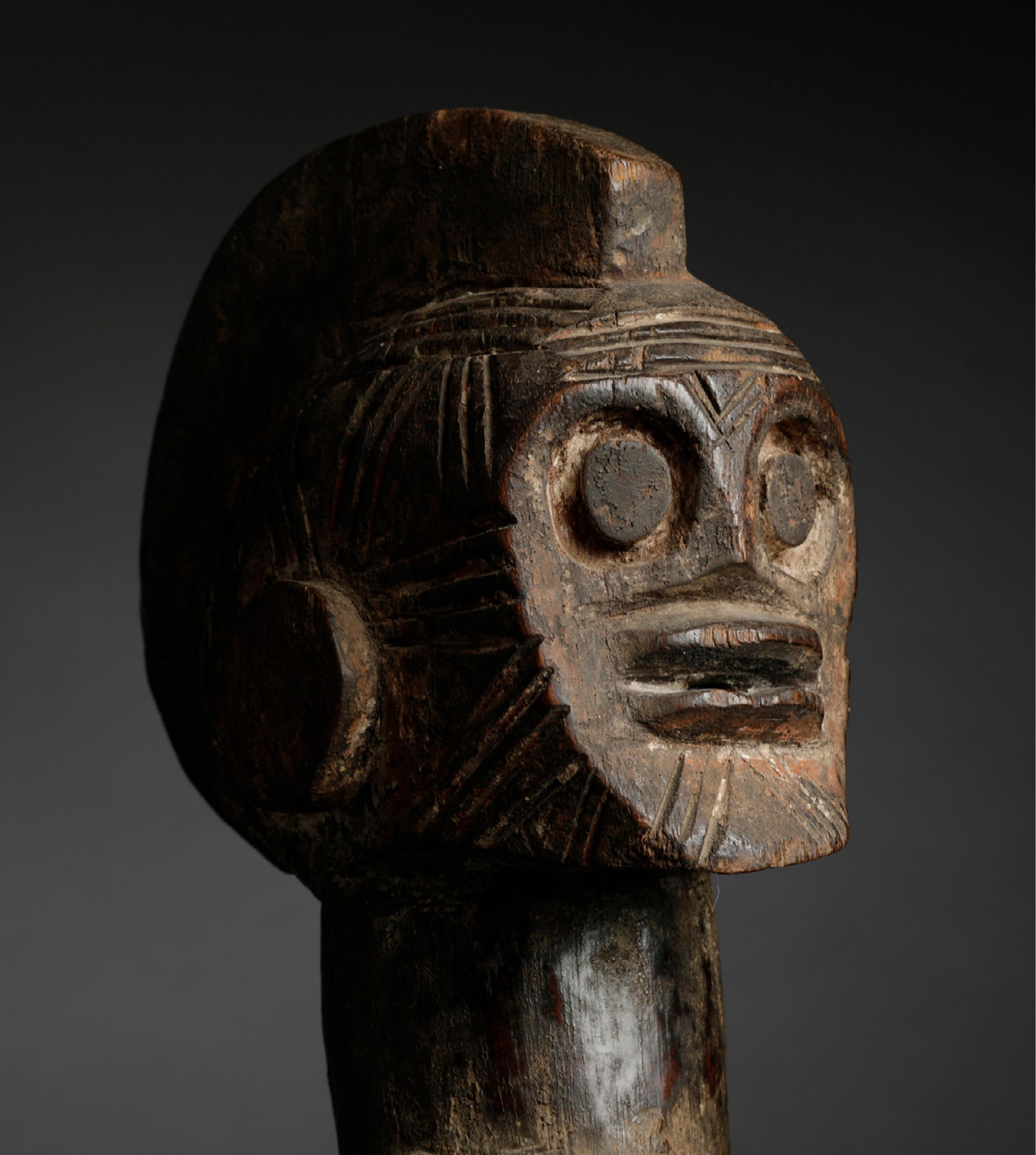
Due to great diversity in social and creative ideas among the Mumuye and the Chamba, and in turn among the many Mumuye subgroups, the figures produced in this region show dramatic variety. Their composition follows a general formula – typically a narrow, vertical body with a cylindrical torso wrapped or shielded by bent arms, creating negative space between; a relatively small head; and bent legs that are often shorter than the torso. The rendering of the head and limbs can be highly divergent. Arms sometimes take a semi-abstract, wing-like shape, and legs can appear jagged and buckled as their masses are pushed further into the geometric. Figures are either male or female, their sexual attributes being expressed with differing degrees of clarity.

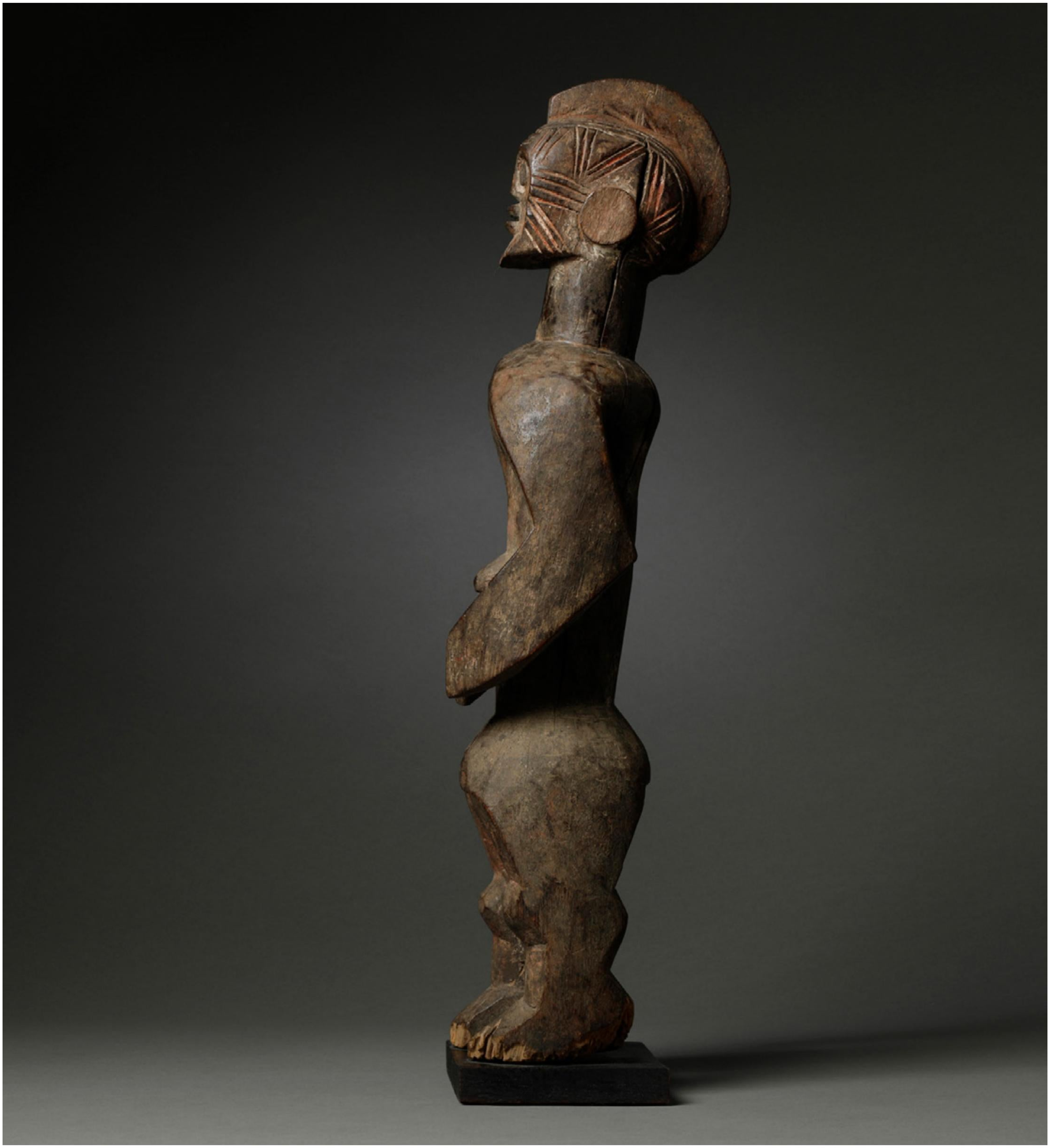
Profound variety marks the usage of Mumuye figures as much as their forms. By report, these sculptures were involved in an astonishing range of contexts: divination, healing, punishment of social deviants, defense against epidemics, peacemaking, funerals, fertility festivals, legal cases, play, and even combat. Figures were sometimes smeared with the sap of specific plants to cause them to 'speak' to their owner or handler. Given their wild diversity in both role and appearance, it is impossible to correlate specific formal characteristics in these sculptures to specific uses.

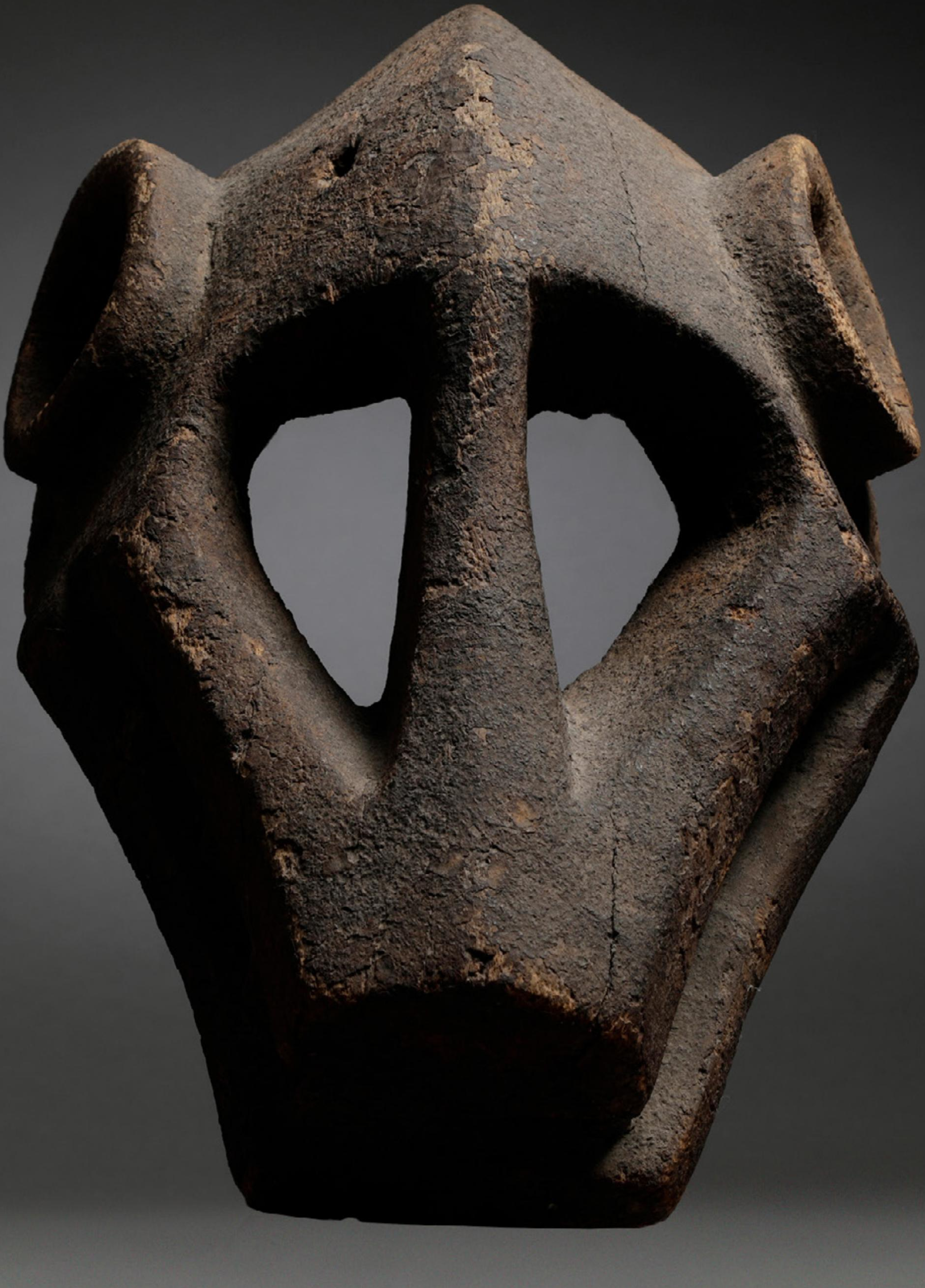
This example from the collection of Roy and Sophie Sieber shows the essential template of Mumuye sculpture, with a columnar body framed by wing-like arms that curve down from the chest in an oval fashion to shield the torso, spreading back at the elbows. Knees jut from the stout legs, which are simply rendered, and a prominent umbilicus protrudes at the belly. Sitting above a thick neck, the face and eyes are quite large, with a widely staring and open-mouthed expression bordered by linear incisions. The head is topped with a short crest. This figure's confident balance of posture and form, combined with its transfixing gaze, lend it considerable sculptural power.











## 10

# BABOON OR MONKEY MASK *N'GON*

### BAMANA, MALI

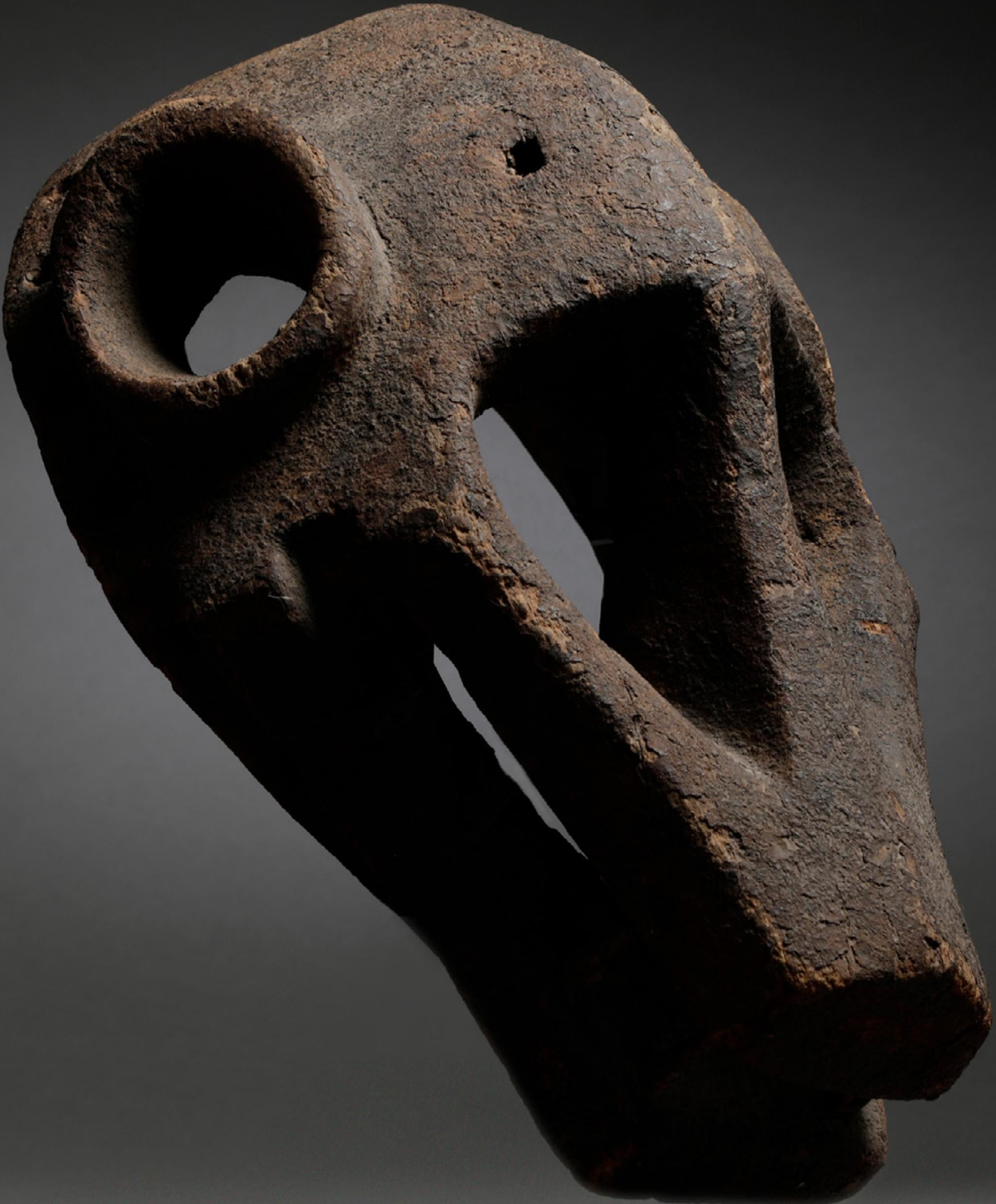
First half 20th century
Wood
Height: 12 in, 30 cm

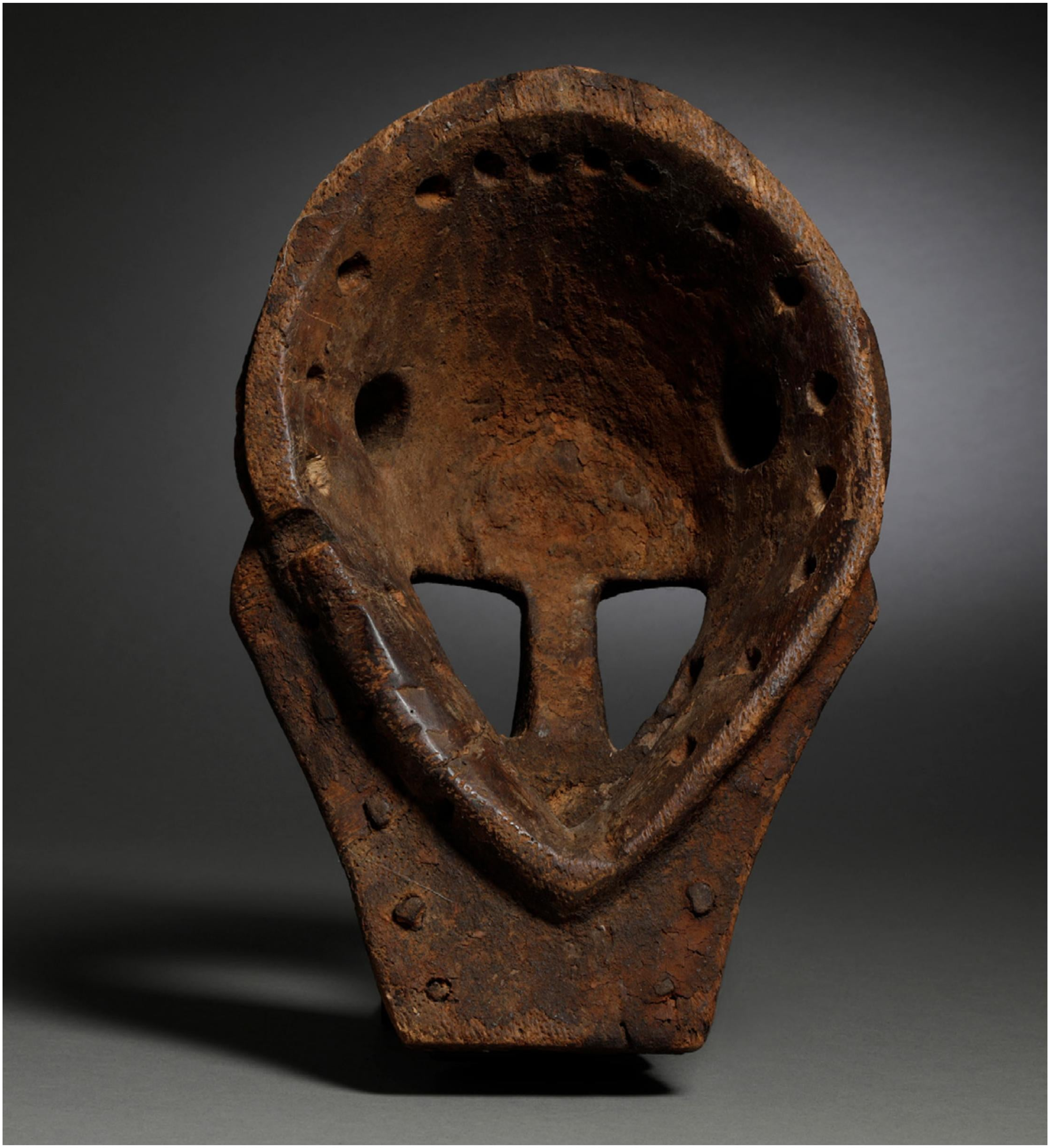
PROVENANCE
Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

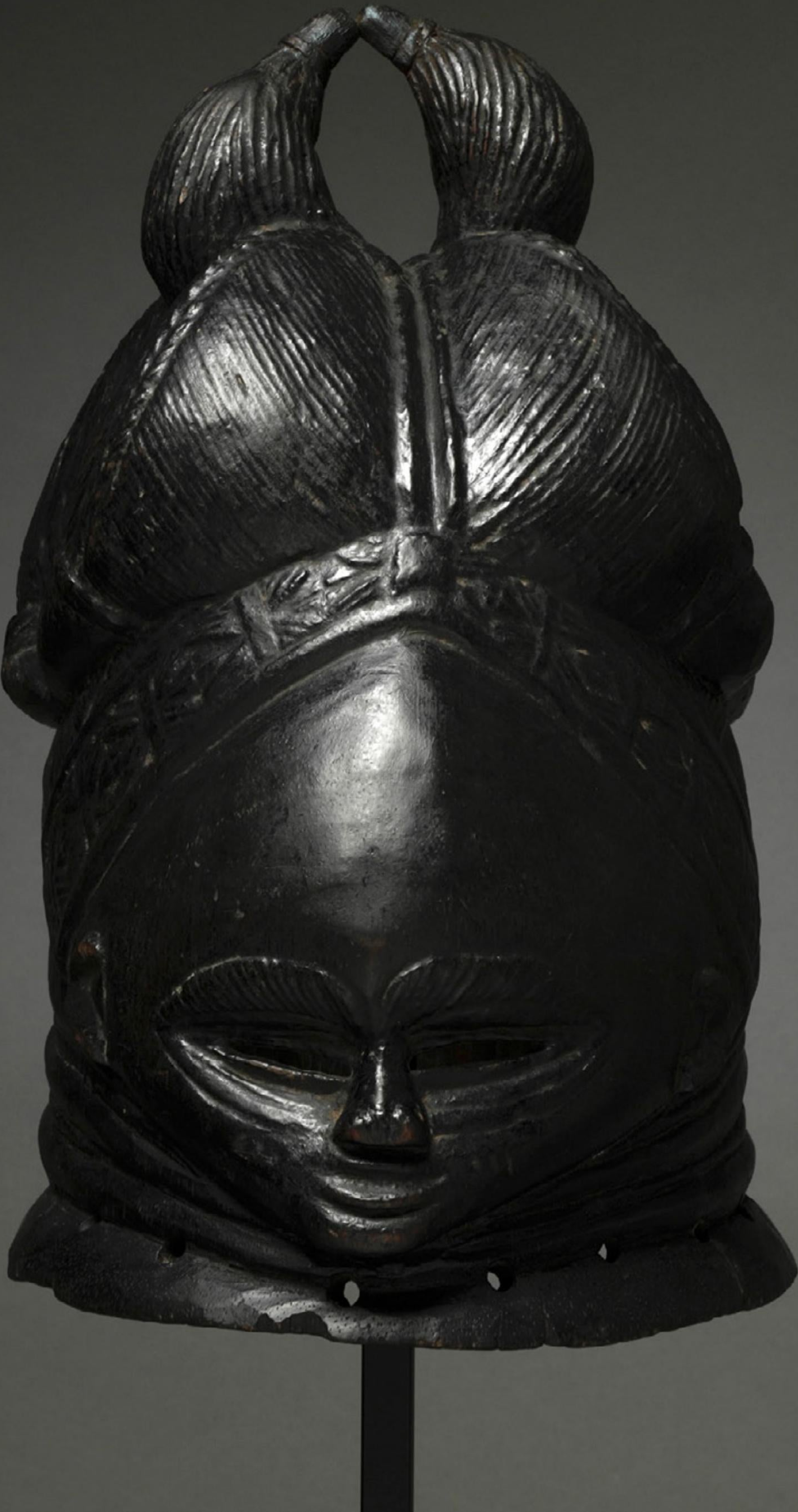
Among the Bamana, important societal and religious ceremonies are infused with an element of humour and satire by the appearance of the monkey or baboon figure (*n'gon*). Arriving before other masqueraders, *n'gon* excites the audience with eccentric acts embodying inappropriate and uncontrolled behavior. As with other animal characters (antelope, hyena, or elephant), dancers of this mask draw inspiration for their movements from sensitive observations of the animal itself. The performance is accordingly chaotic, and the masker lunges amid the crowd, dealing out mockery and indulging in crude sexual gestures. The *n'gon* mask is also known to cause mischief in the greater village, sometimes trespassing into homes to steal food or other objects.

Alongside the hyena and the lion, the monkey or baboon completes the trio animal symbols associated with the Kore initiation society, a secret men's group of the Bamana. Kore tradition guides young boys through an initiation school hidden in the bush, where they must pass a series of physical and mental tests and then symbolically die before being reborn as a man of the community. With their initiations complete, the men return to the village in the guise and character of the three animal masks.

This is a finely composed *n'gon* mask with strong, balanced proportions and lovely openwork presenting a projecting, skull-like design. The individually carved teeth and large eyes give this mask a special attitude and heighten its animalistic aura. In contrast with some other variations of the *n'gon* that are flatter and more abstract, this mask translates a mischievous simian character more naturalistically. Its surface is richly textured and earthy, rough with erosion and accumulated patina.







11

# HELMET MASK OF A WOMAN *SOWEI*

MENDE, SIERRA LEONE

First half 20th century

Wood

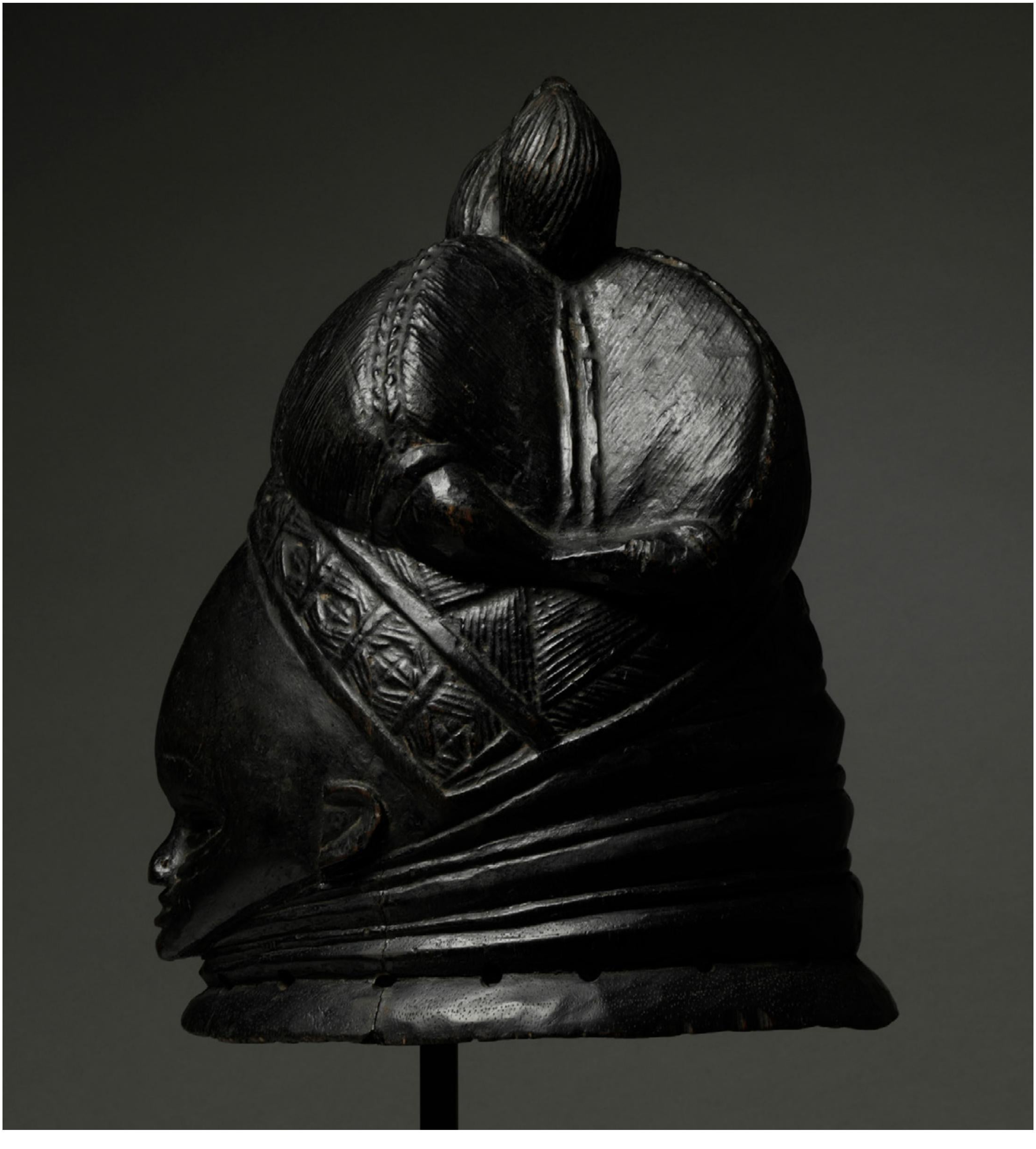
Height: 13 in, 33 cm

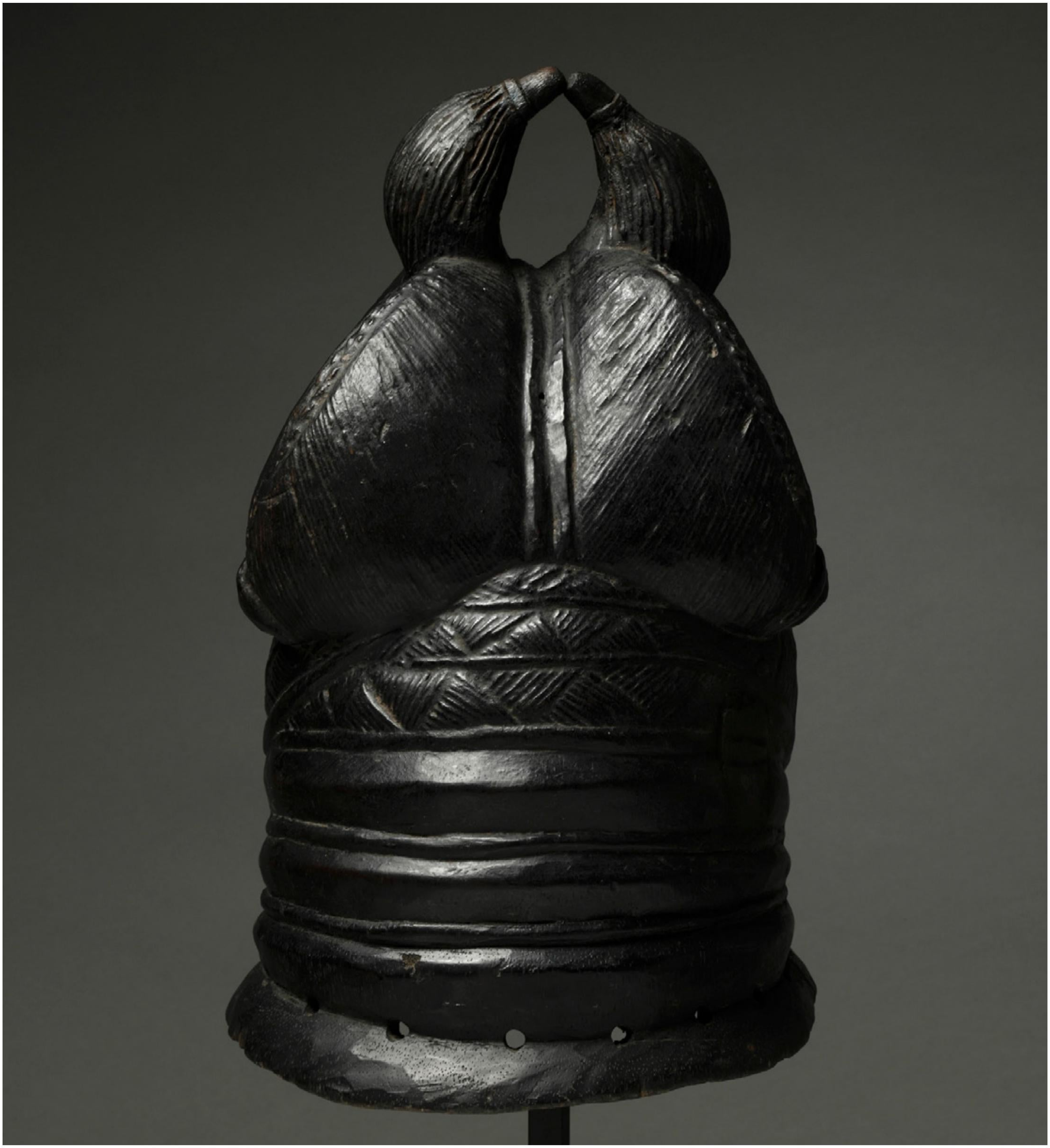
PROVENANCE

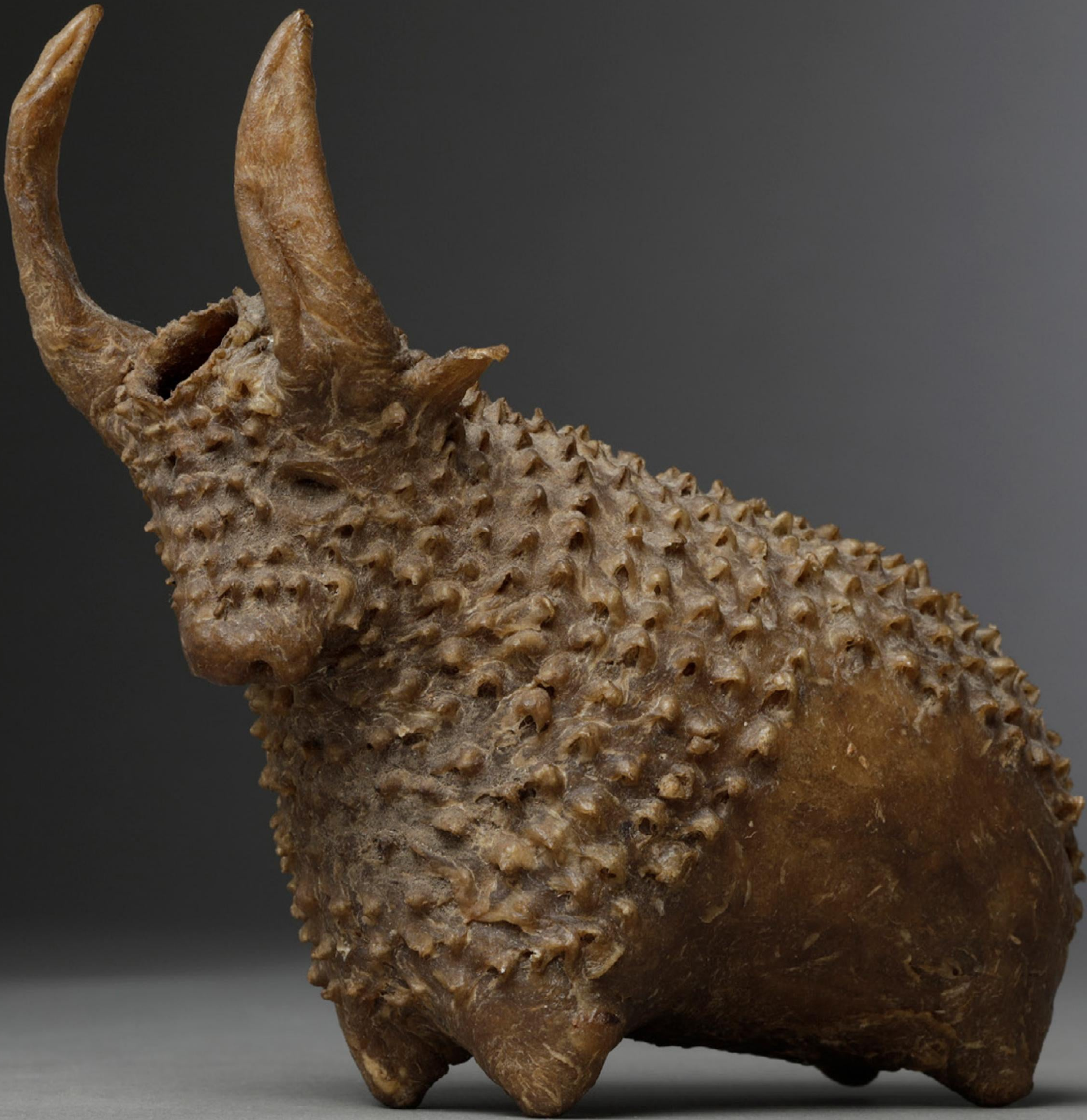
Private collection

Mende society is governed by several esoteric associations, foremost among which are the Sande women's and Poro men's societies. Both prepare young initiates for adulthood and make extensive use of masquerade. The helmet mask presented here, known as sowei, represents a Sande guardian spirit. It is utilized by a dance expert (ndoli jowei, a term sometimes used to refer to the mask itself) and appears at a host of Sande rites and birth and funeral ceremonies. From generation to generation, these masks served to induct the new women of the tribe into the next chapter of their lives, revealing and passing on the knowledge of their ancestors.

Classic *sowei* features are shown in this mask, with its expansive, round forehead over a small face, semi-closed eyes and sharp chin, mild expression, tightly bunched neck rings, and high, elaborate coiffure. The lavish and crown-like hairstyles that grace *sowei* masks are always a highlight. This example shows two mirrored forms of rhythmic, swelling lobes that sweep up from the banded brow line in the manner of horns, lightly touching at the apex, their striated surfaces underscoring a feeling of twist and flow.







12

# SNUFF CONTAINER IN THE FORM OF AN OX

XHOSA, SOUTH AFRICA

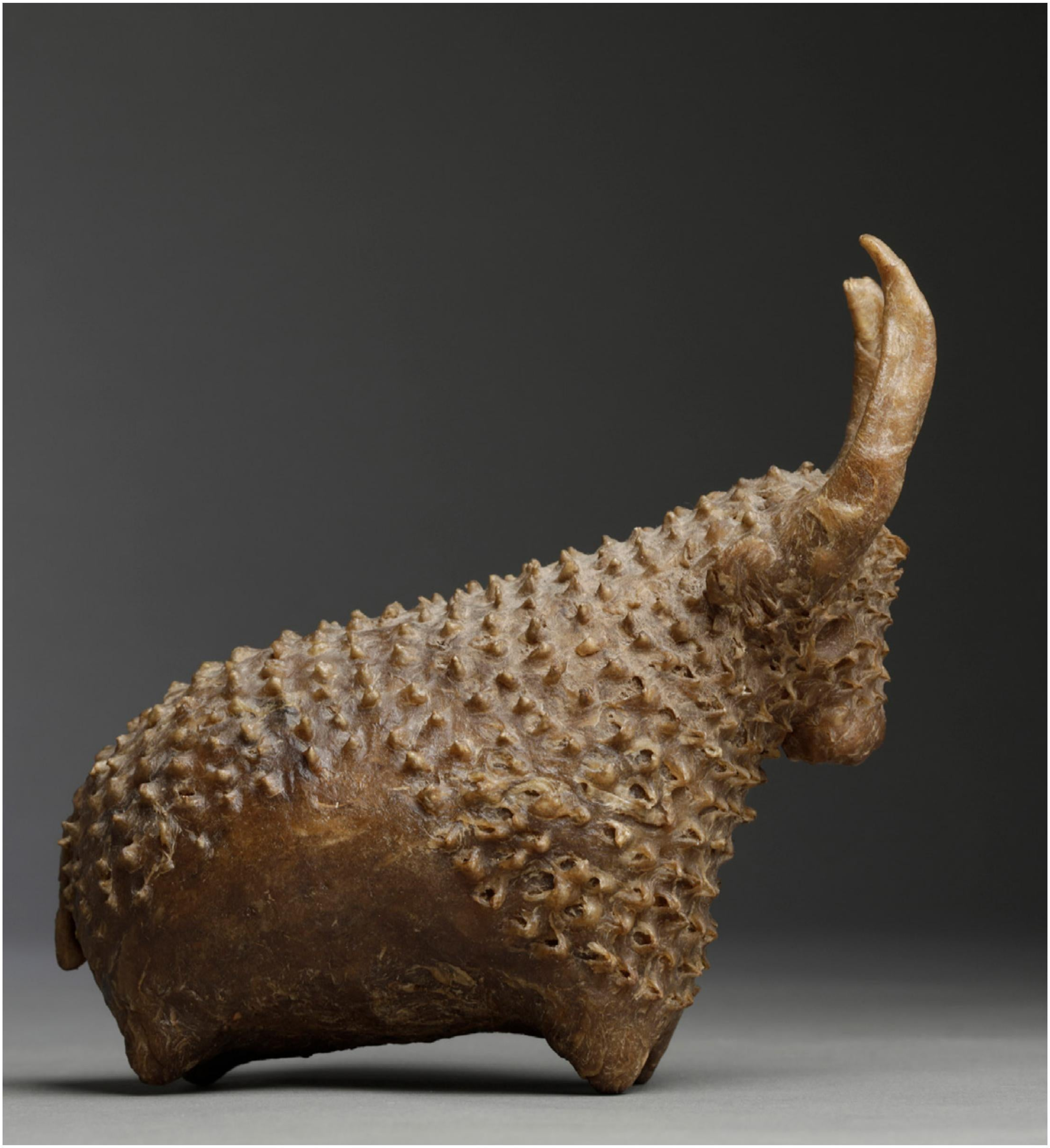
Third quarter of the 19th century
Animal hide
Height: 5 in, 13 cm, Width: 5 in, 13 cm

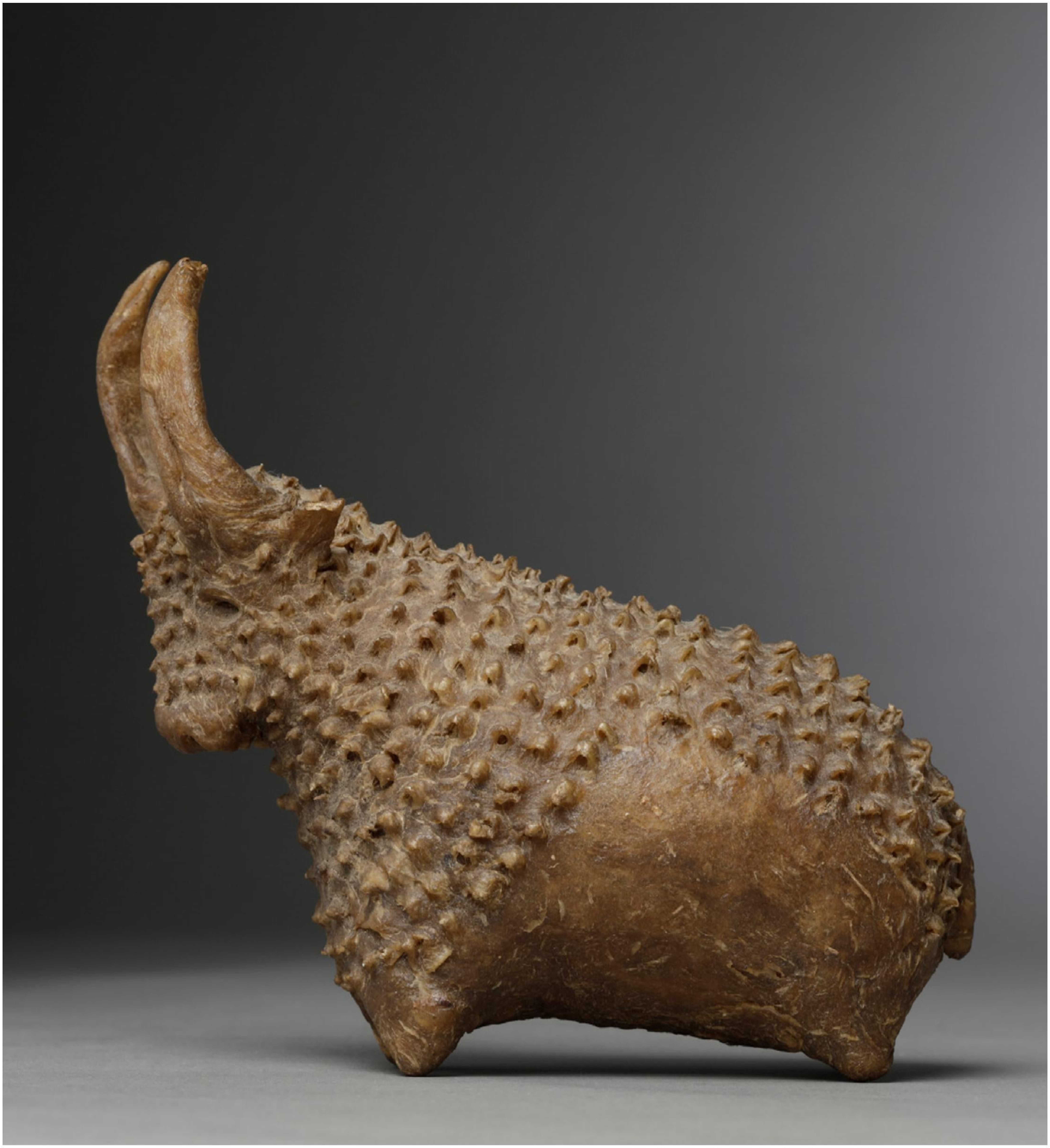
PROVENANCE
Private collection, Chicago, IL

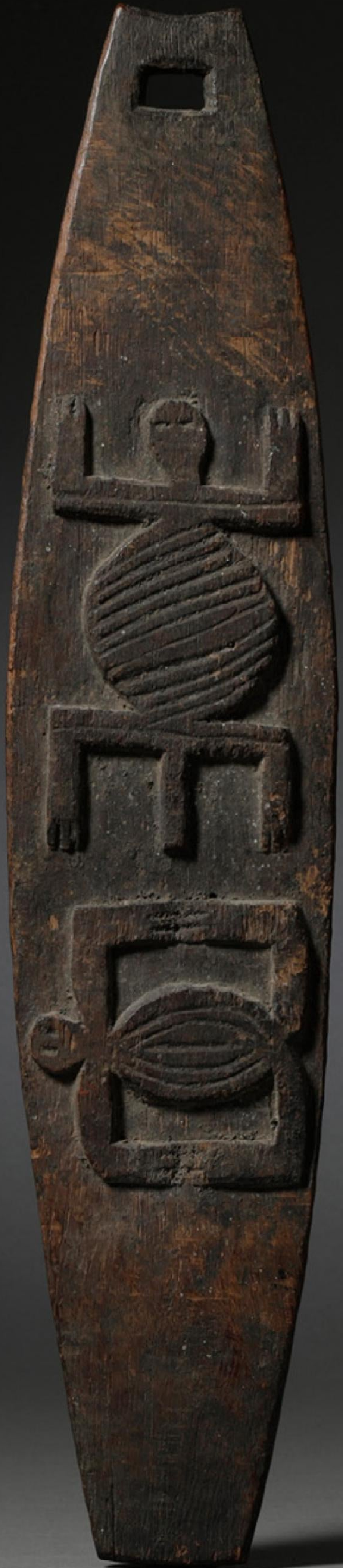
This distinctive type of zoomorphic snuff container is associated with a region in the Eastern Cape, a province of South Africa. Often depicting domestic animals, they were sculpted from a paste of blood and hide scrapings with ochre or powdered clay, which was applied around a mould (of clay, sand, or wax) and left in the sun to dry. Once the figure had partially hardened, the details and surface texture were pricked out using a fine tool. The final step was to cut a hole for the removal of the mould; this then became the opening for the container, which was closed with a stopper.

These containers were sometimes adorned with beadwork, and were carried in a pouch or hung from the waist by a thong. This is a particularly fine rendition of an ox, with large upraised horns and a massive body with low center of gravity, poised on four very short legs. Similar examples are held in the British Museum.

Tobacco and snuff were important and ubiquitous elements of both social and ritual culture in southern Africa. Figuring prominently in casual and recreational activities, tobacco was also powerfully associated with the ancestors and was used as a means of spiritual connection and communication, conferring upon it a complex range of symbolism. Accordingly, the breadth of design in tobacco paraphernalia shows a wide span, running from exceedingly simple forms to ornate creations such as this remarkable ox figure.







## 13

# BULLROARER

## YORUBA, NIGERIA

First half of the 20th century
Wood
Height: 18 in, 46 cm

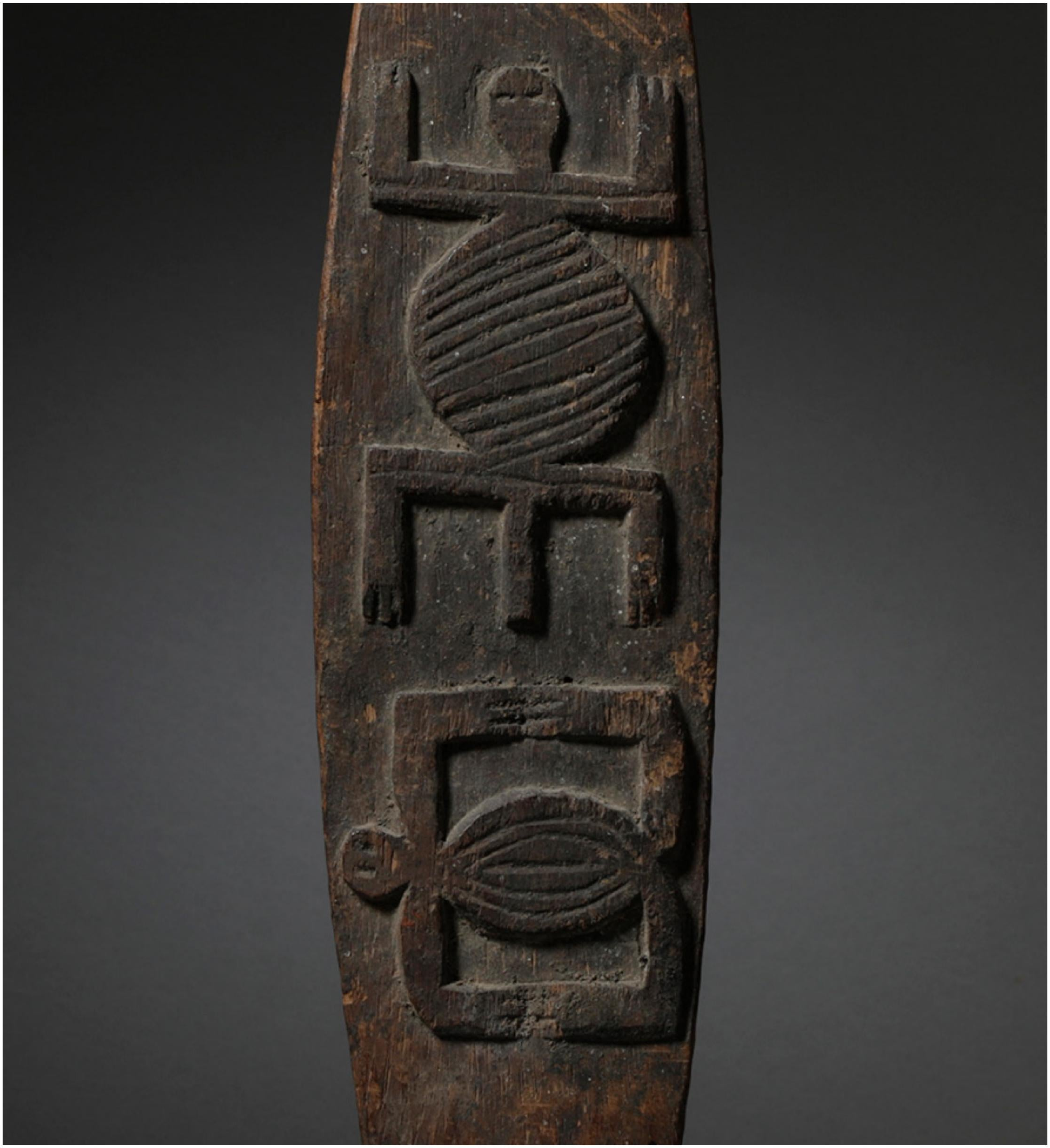
PROVENANCE
Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

The bullroarer, a device known broadly across the world and sometimes called a *rhombus*, or *turndun* in Australian Aboriginal tradition, is an ancient sound object. It has historically been used in ceremonial contexts and for communicating over great distances. It consists of a flat piece of wood attached to a cord, which, when whirled overhead in a large circle, produces a deep vibrational sound.

Bullroarers date to the Paleolithic era, with some examples dating as early as 18,000 BCE. Anthropologist Michael Boyd, a bullroarer expert, has documented finds in Australia, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The *rhombus* was used in the Dionysian mysteries of the ancient Greeks, and figured prominently among the Australian Aboriginal peoples, where it was used in ceremonies and to communicate between groups across the continent. Many of the cultures that use bullroarers believe that the sounds they produce have the power to ward off evil influences.

The Yoruba of Nigeria historically used these ancient noisemakers in the rites and festivals of Orò, the male *orisha* of communal justice. Bullroarers were integrally associated with this spirit, and the buzzing drone of their whirling warned away those who were forbidden to see the rites, namely women and non-believers.

This beautifully aged bullroarer shows a vaguely ovoid silhouette, with gently convex sides and sharp, flat ends, and a square-shaped hole for attachment. Its face bears relief carvings depicting zoomorphic and possibly human images rendered in geometric style, showing only the most schematic features. An emphasis is placed on their torsos or bellies, which in contrast to the rectilinear bodies are designed with swelling, round, and striated shapes.



14

# SWORD ORNAMENT IN THE FORM OF A TORTOISE

ASANTE, GHANA

First half 20th century
Gilded nickel
Height: 3 in, 7 ½ cm, Width: 7 in, 18 cm, Length: 8 in, 20 cm

PROVENANCE
Niger Bend Gallery, Chittenango, New York, 2012
A distinguished private collection

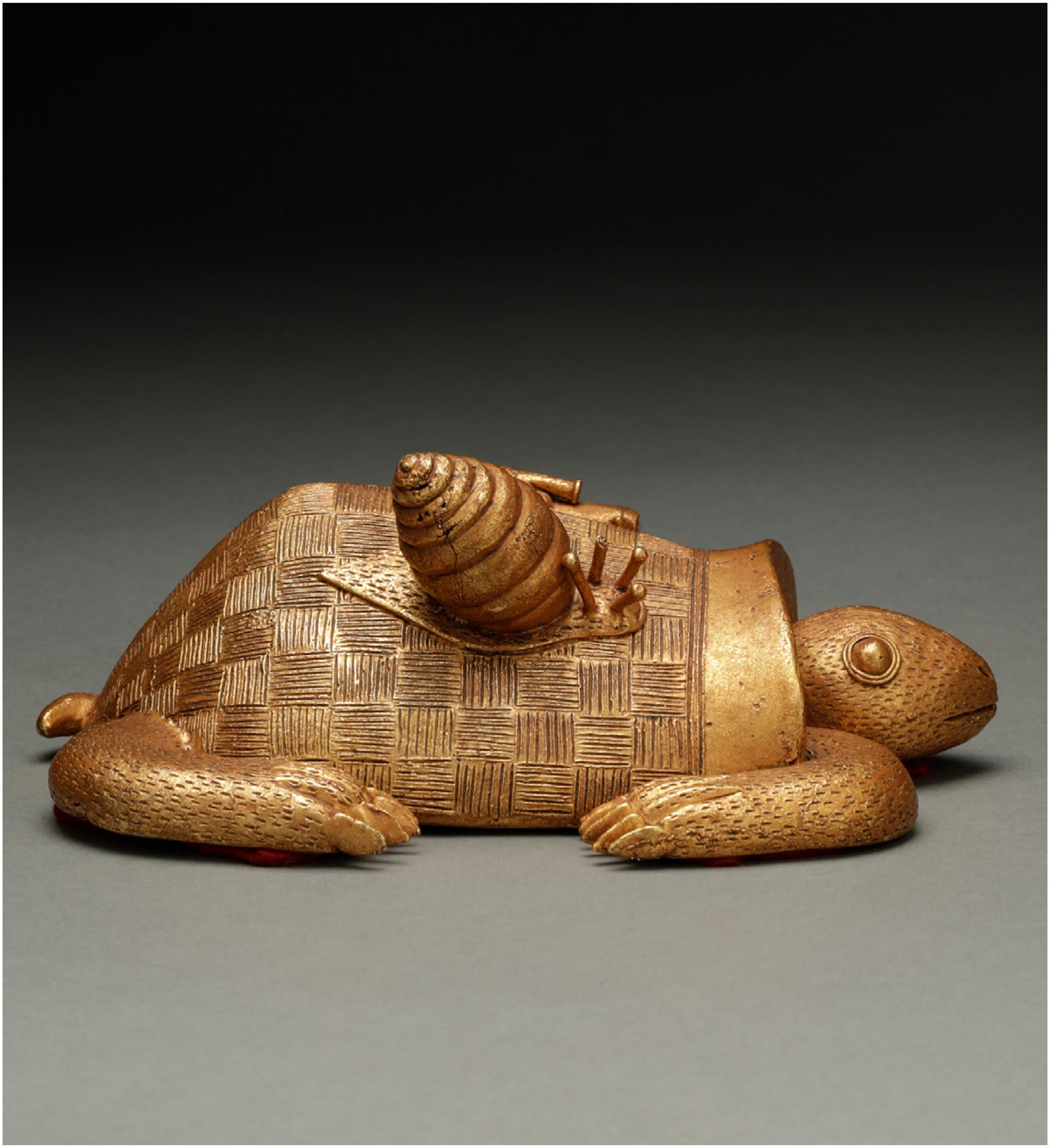
The goldwork traditions of the Akan peoples, especially the Asante, encompass a wide variety of forms and have been a source of admiration for centuries. While whimsical, charming goldweights (*abrammuo*) are a familiar focus for collectors, Asante metalworkers also produced more elaborate works. As early as the eighteenth century, European visitors in Ghana wrote about the Asante's spectacular military regalia, which today forms part of the state treasury and is brought forth on special occasions.

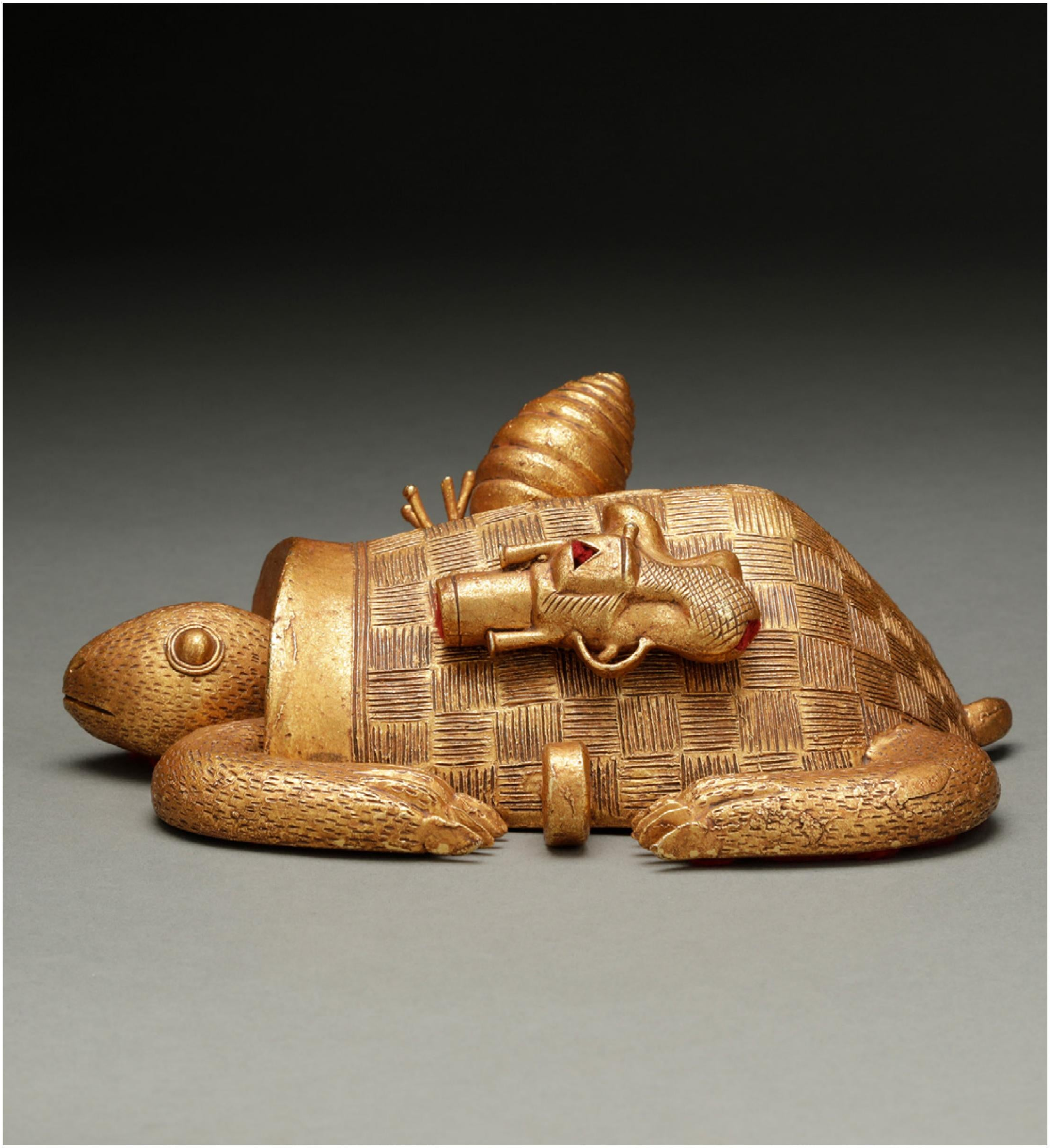
Sword ornaments were one such type of regalia. Historically seen as divinely empowered, swords played a prominent role in Akan rituals, including oath of office ceremonies and chiefly purification rites. Cast gold pieces were hung from the hilts or scabbards of high-ranking court figures, symbolizing political and military strength through iconography that often alluded to traditional proverbs and teachings.

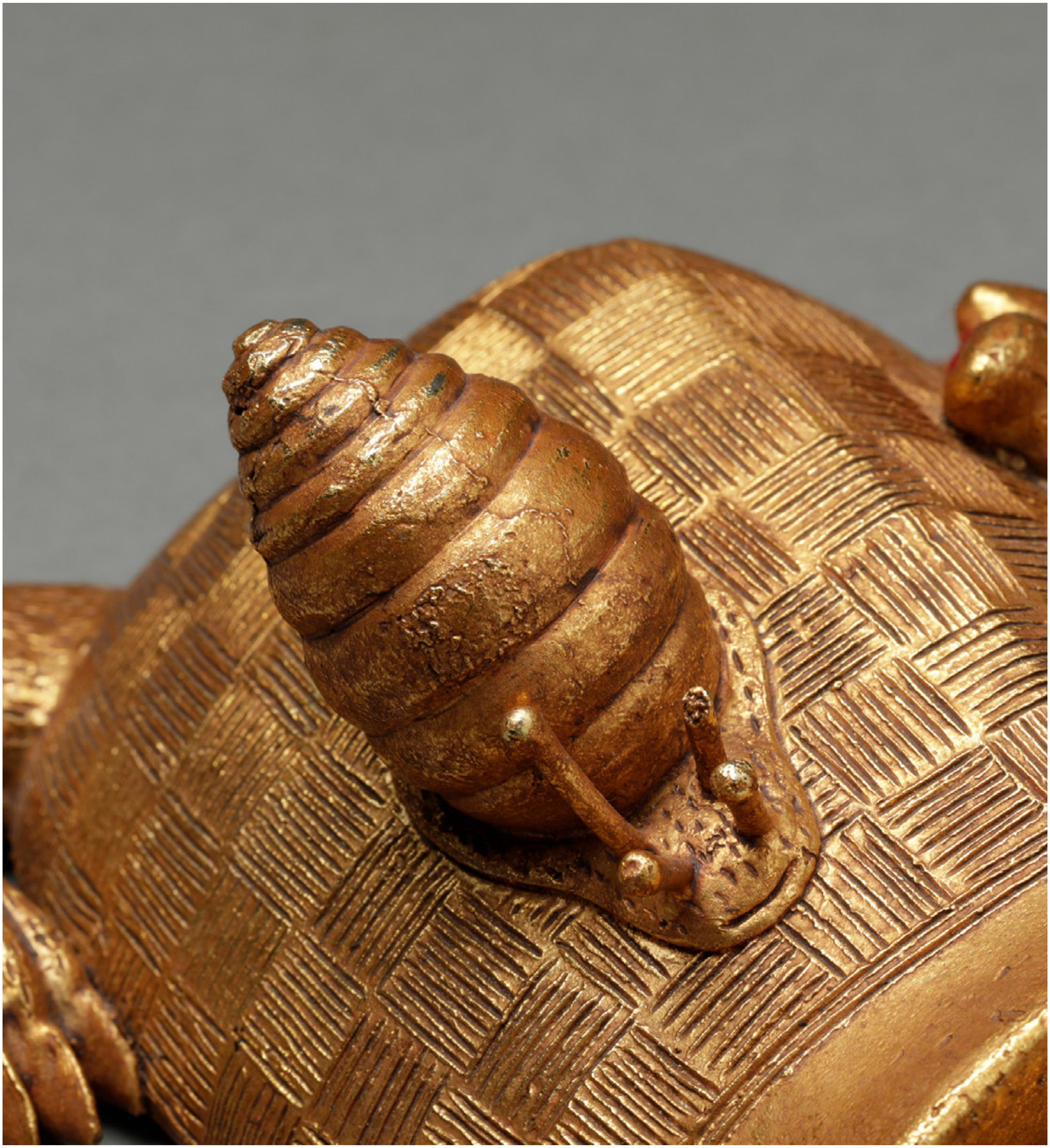
These chiefly objects were cast in the lost wax (*cire perdue*) process and on average measure between thirteen and eighteen centimeters long. Though fine and thin-walled, they rarely show casting flaws. Red felt or velvet is often stuffed inside the ornament to provide a rich contrast to the brilliant gold and highlight any openwork details. While Ghanaian treasuries today hold several dozen of these ornaments, they are quite rare in Western collections.

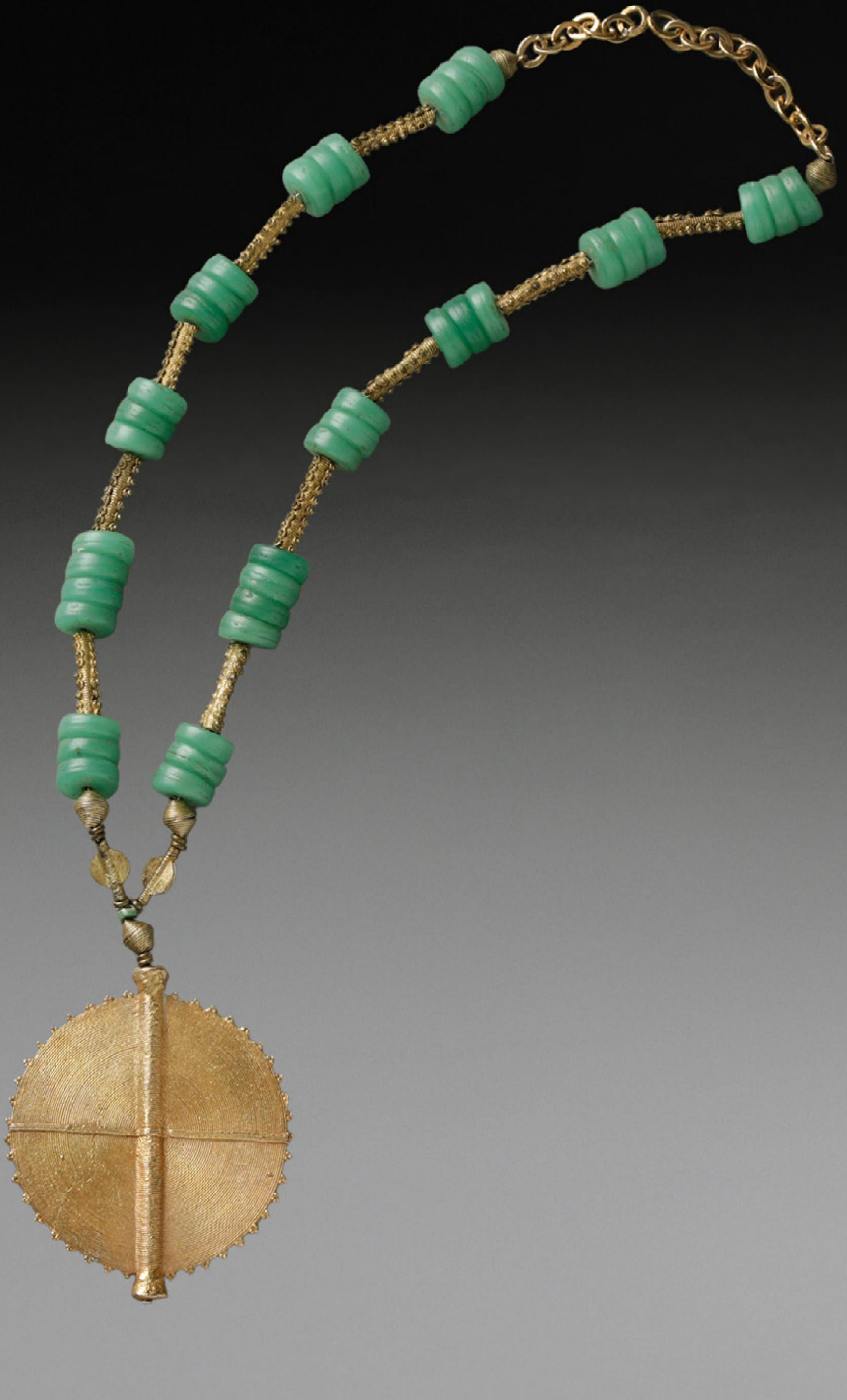
This finely sculpted and well-preserved ornament uses images of animals and objects to communicate these ideas. In Asante folklore, the tortoise is a cunning character who uses intelligence, resilience, and planning rather than strength to overcome challenges. Snails are symbols of patience and perseverance, reflecting Asante wisdom that prizes slow, careful progress over hasty and impulsive action.

Also notable here is the pistol, which alludes not only to martial potency but to connections with European trade, and thus to political and commercial prestige. Martial symbols are predominant on sword ornaments, and references to firearms and the modernizing trends of warfare appear through images of powder kegs, pistols, and machine guns. Firearms were fundamental to the expansionist ambitions of the Asante state, and many wars were fought with the southern Akan for access to the coastal trade in powder and weapons.









15

# NECKLACE WITH GOLD DISK PENDANT

ASANTE OR BAULE, GHANA/COTE D'IVOIRE

First half 20th century

Gold or gilded copper

Length: 18 in, 46 cm cm, Width of disk: 2 ½ in, 6 cm

PROVENANCE

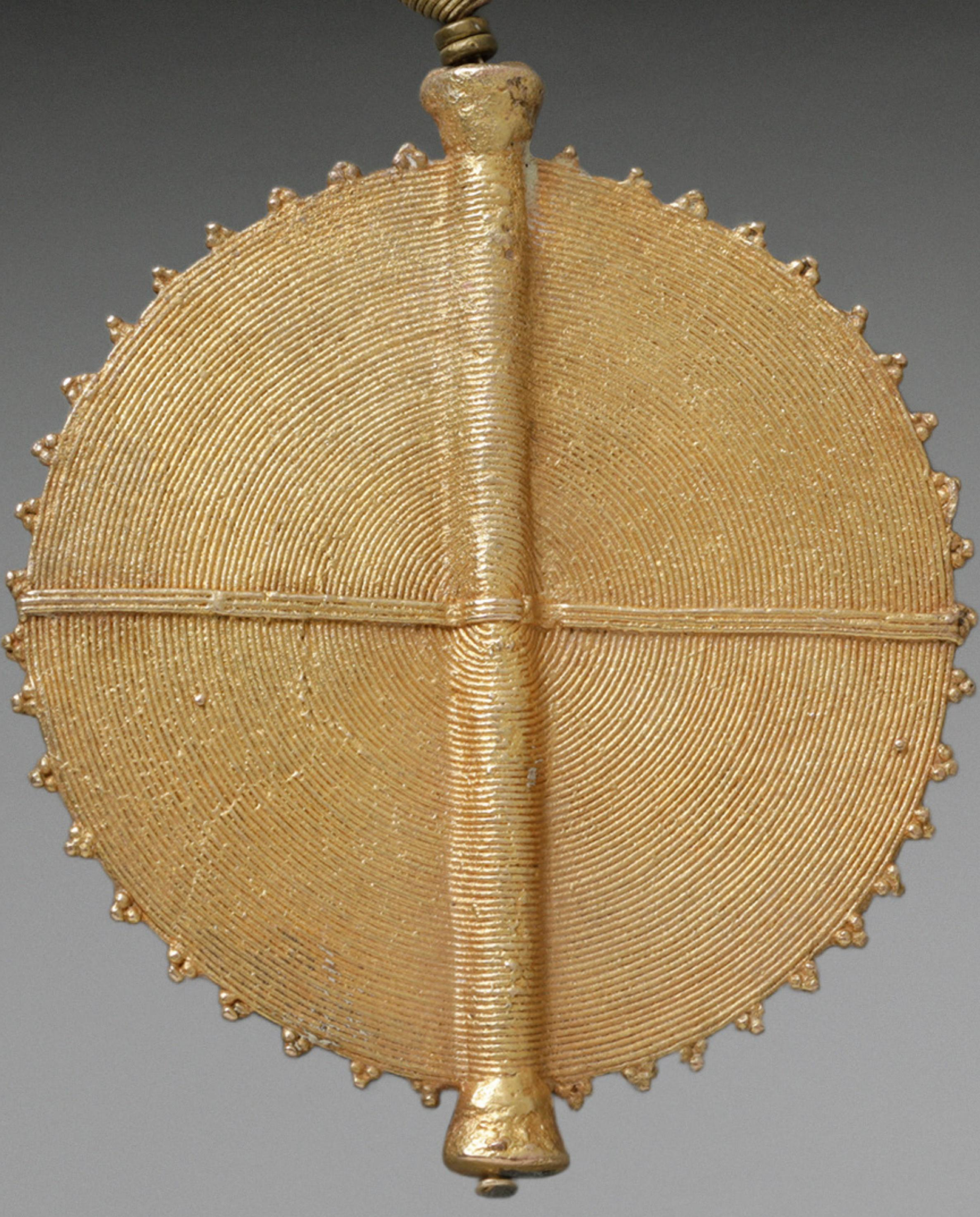
Paul and Ruth Tishman, NY

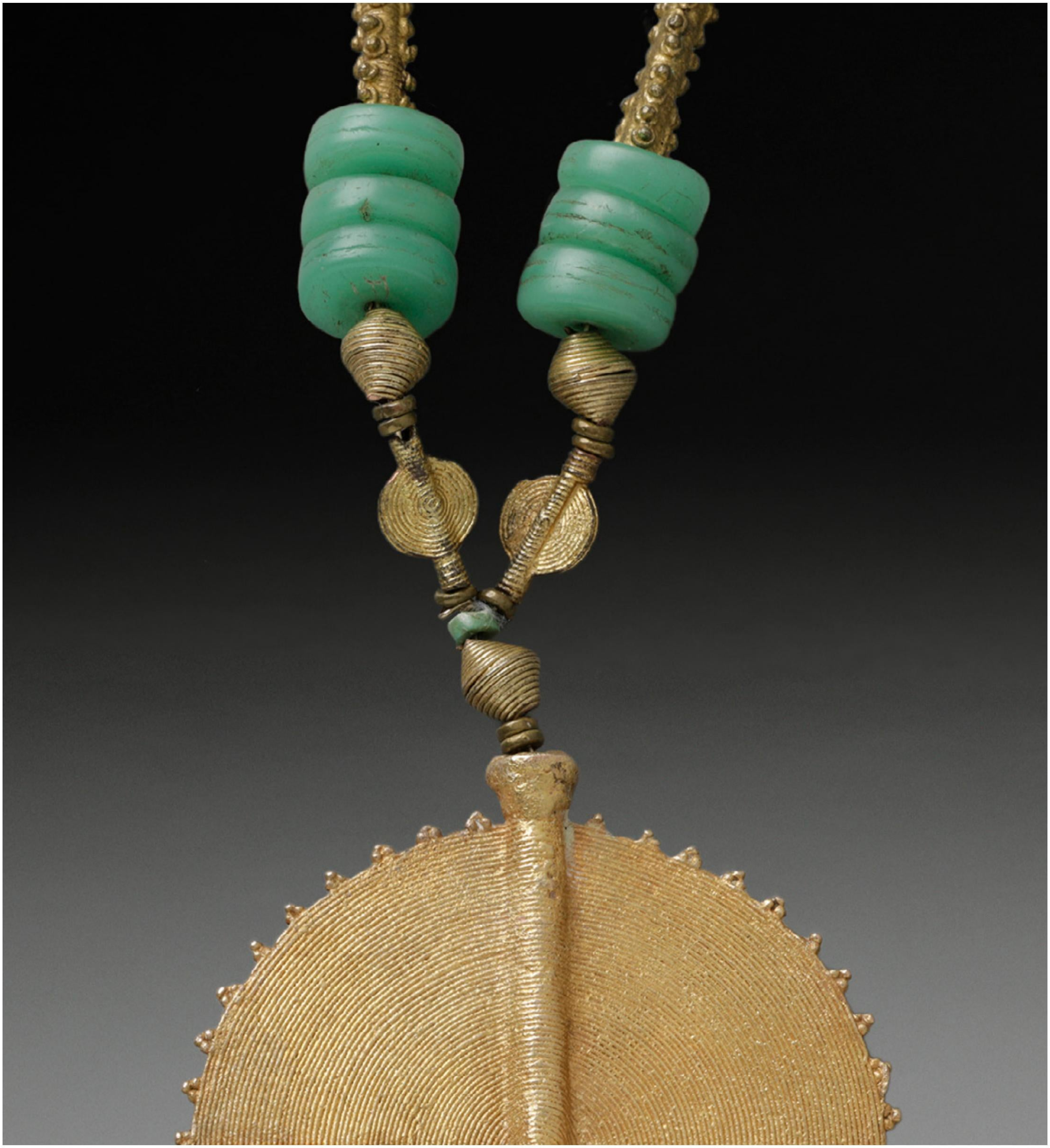
Arte Primitivo, New York, June 2006

A distinguished private collection

Asante gold necklaces featuring disk-shaped pendants, known as *akrafokonmu* or 'soul washer's disks,' are symbols of leadership, spirituality, and protection. These ornate gold discs are traditionally worn by rulers, queen mothers, and officials called *akrafo*, who perform rituals to cleanse leaders' souls. Intricate, radiating patterns are often worked into the faces of these disks, evoking the sun's life-giving energy and underscoring gold's association with the vital life force (*kra*).

*Akrafokonmu* are crafted with techniques such as lost-wax casting and repoussé, showcasing the exceptional skill of Asante goldsmiths. This exquisite pendant features a shining disk with sawtooth border, its surface quartered by a narrow central column and faint horizontal crossbar. Groups of soft green beads are worked into the beautifully arranged chain, alternating with finely detailed gold bars.





16

# GOLD EARRINGS

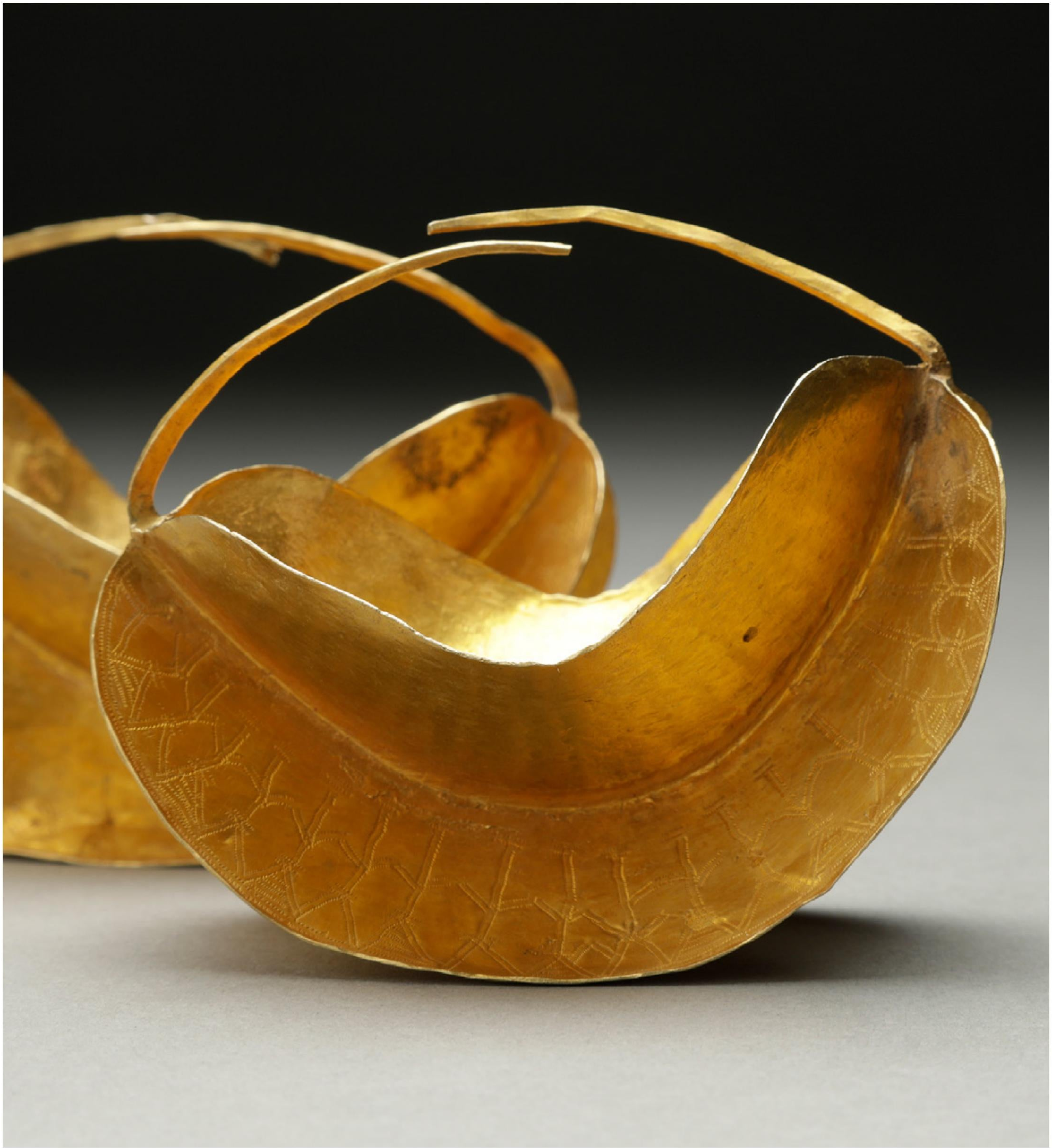
## FULANI PEOPLE, WEST AFRICA

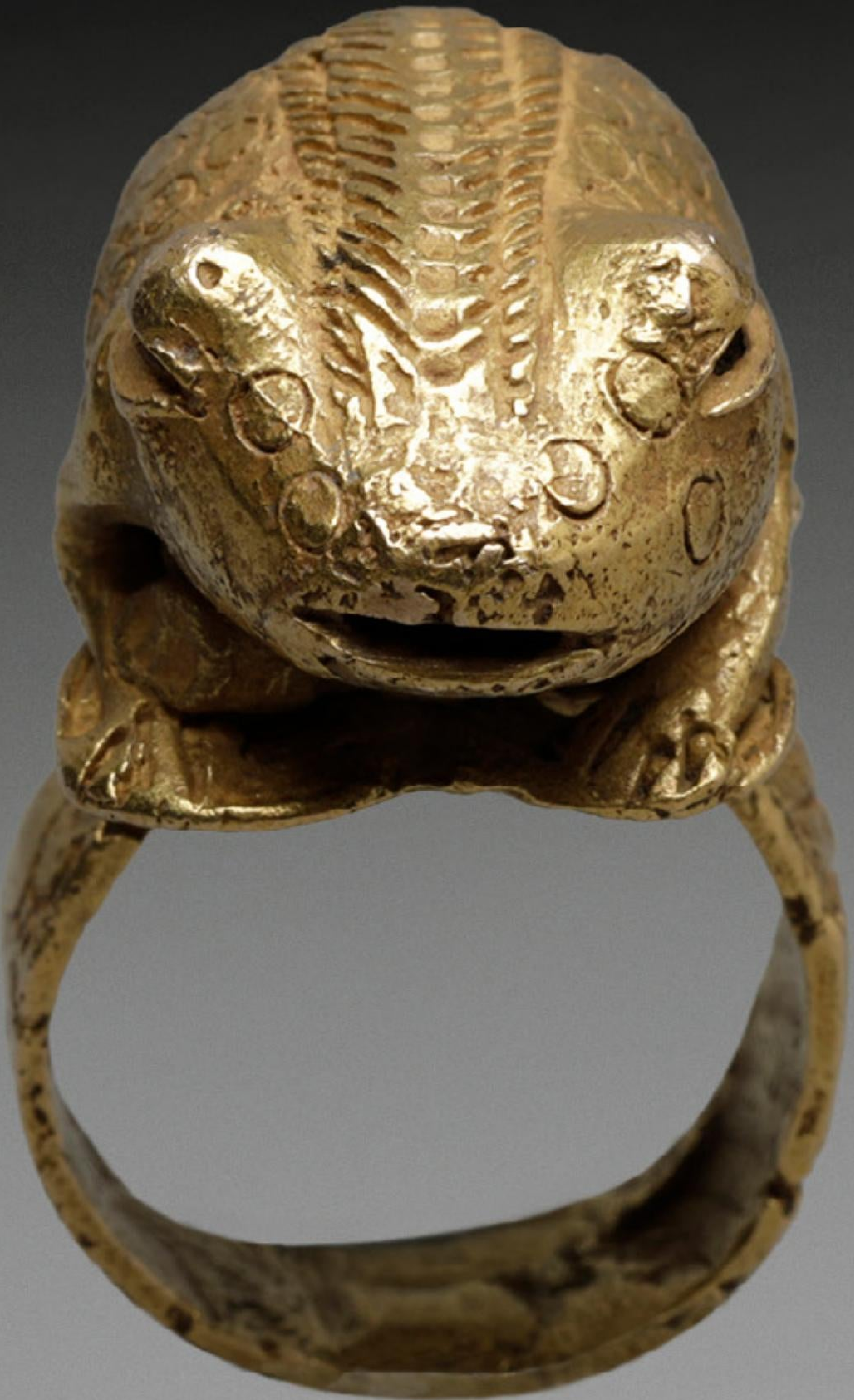
First half 20th century
Gold
Width: 4 in, 10 cm, Height: 3 in, 8 cm

PROVENANCE
Montse Ester, Barcelona
David Serra, 2010
A distinguished private collection

Gold earrings of the Fulani peoples of west Africa – particularly in Mali, Senegal, and Niger – are known for their distinctive traditional design. At times remarkably large, these striking ornaments are made from a number of thin gold or gold-plated leaves, joined together and curved or twisted into a pendulous form that can hang as far as the wearer's shoulders. Signifying wealth and status, they have been worn in both ritual and everyday contexts.

This fine pair shows the classic composition and brilliant luster of these ornaments. Geometric linear designs are carefully worked into the lower leaves, rewarding close inspection.





17

# RING WITH FROG

ASANTE, GHANA

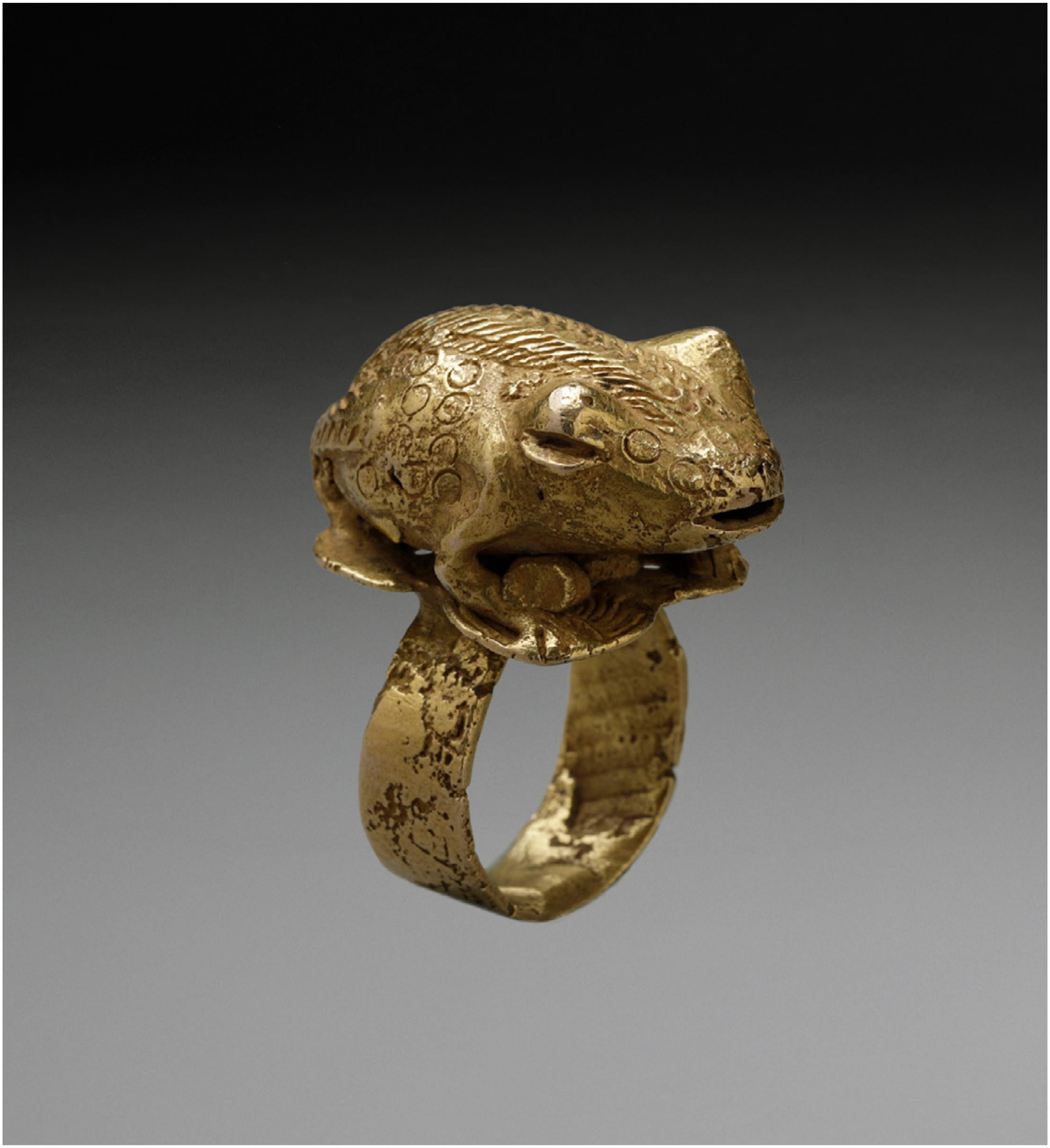
First half 20th century
Gold
Height: 1 ½ in, 4 cm

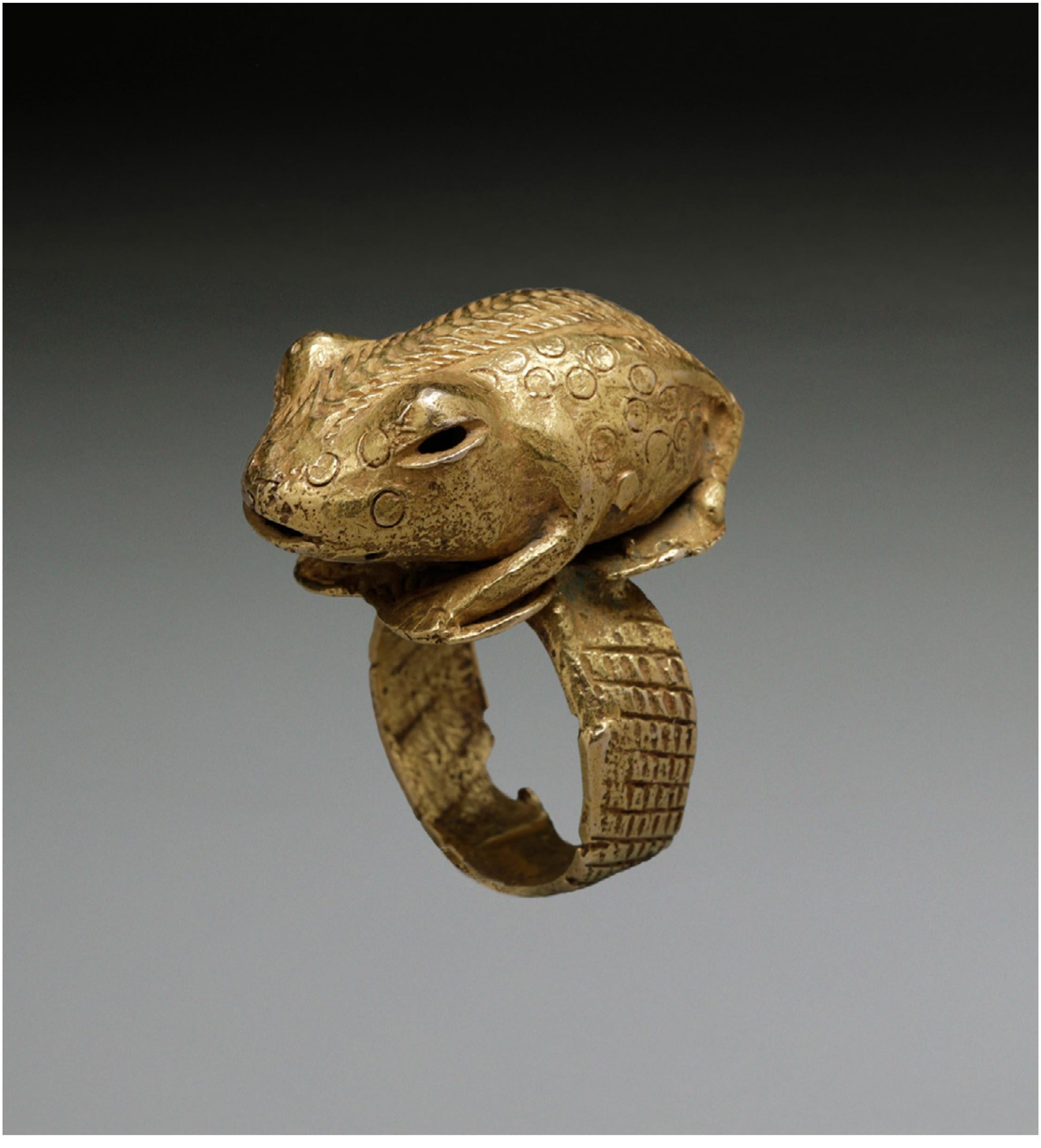
PROVENANCE
Owen Hargreaves, London, 2008
A distinguished private collection

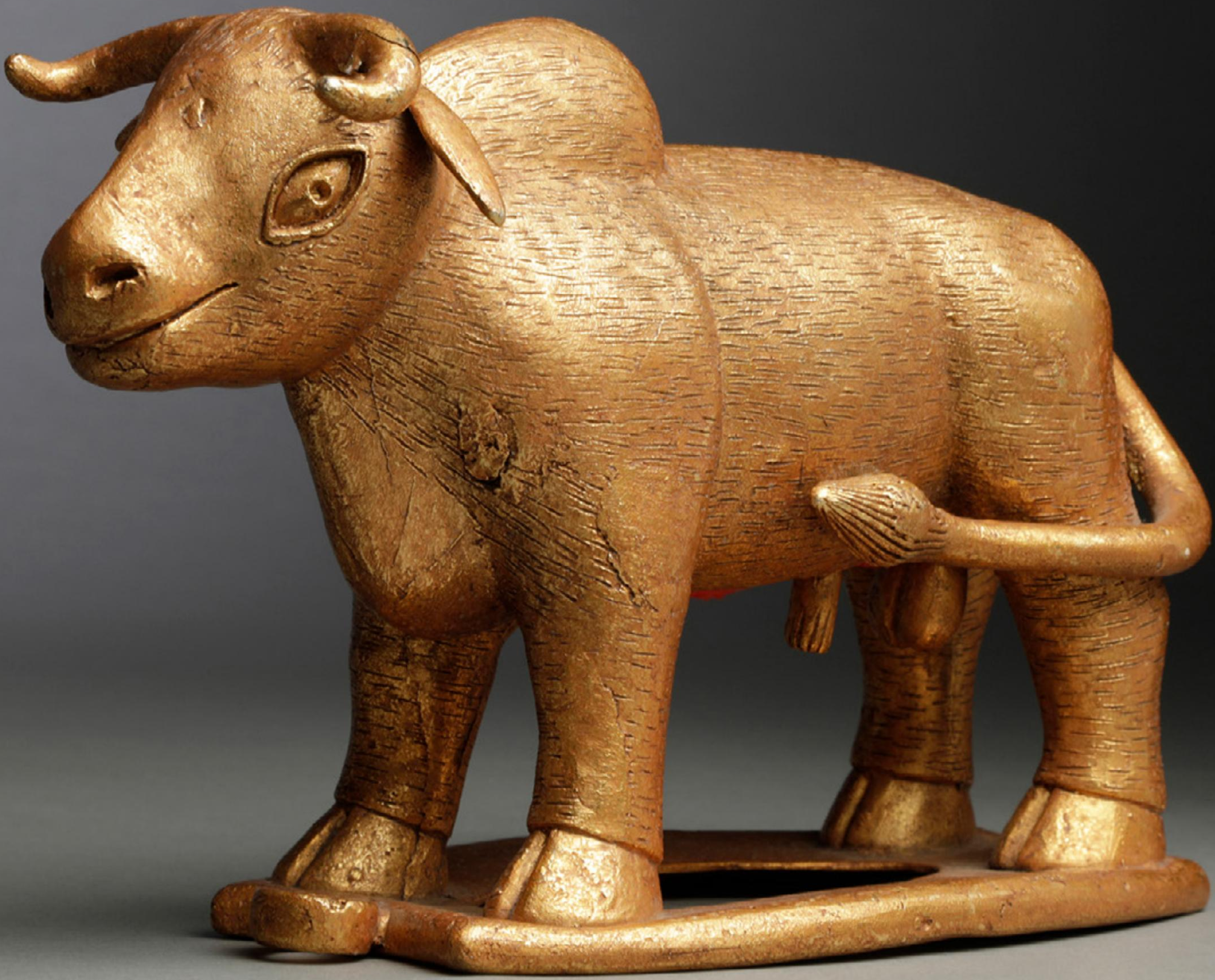
Gold mining and manufacture formed the foundation of Ghana's economy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a time of territorial expansion and thriving commerce for the kingdom. Accordingly, the nation's artisans excelled in fine goldsmithing and ornamentation, and specialists provided for the significant demands of the political elite. With such an abundance of raw material, royal workshops were free to produce without constraint, pursuing a panoply of sculptural ideas.

Ornaments featuring animal images were a favored theme of the Asante court. They communicated not just wealth and power, but also deeper allusions to Asante proverbs that conveyed the virtues a successful ruler would be expected to have.

This fine ring, with its charming image of a plump frog, carried its own set of associations. Frogs' capacity to thrive both on land and in water, as well as their transformation from tadpole to adult, symbolized adaptability and an important capacity for change. Their prodigious rate of reproduction was a signifier of abundance and fertility, and they were also used to illustrate the power of careful speech.







## 18

# GOLD BULL SWORD ORNAMENT

ASANTE, GHANA

First half 20th century

Gilded nickel

Height: 7 in, 18 cm, Width: 10 ½ in, 27 cm

PROVENANCE

Vittorino Menenghelli collection (1915-2010)

Niger Bend Gallery, Chittenango, New York, November 2012

A distinguished private collection

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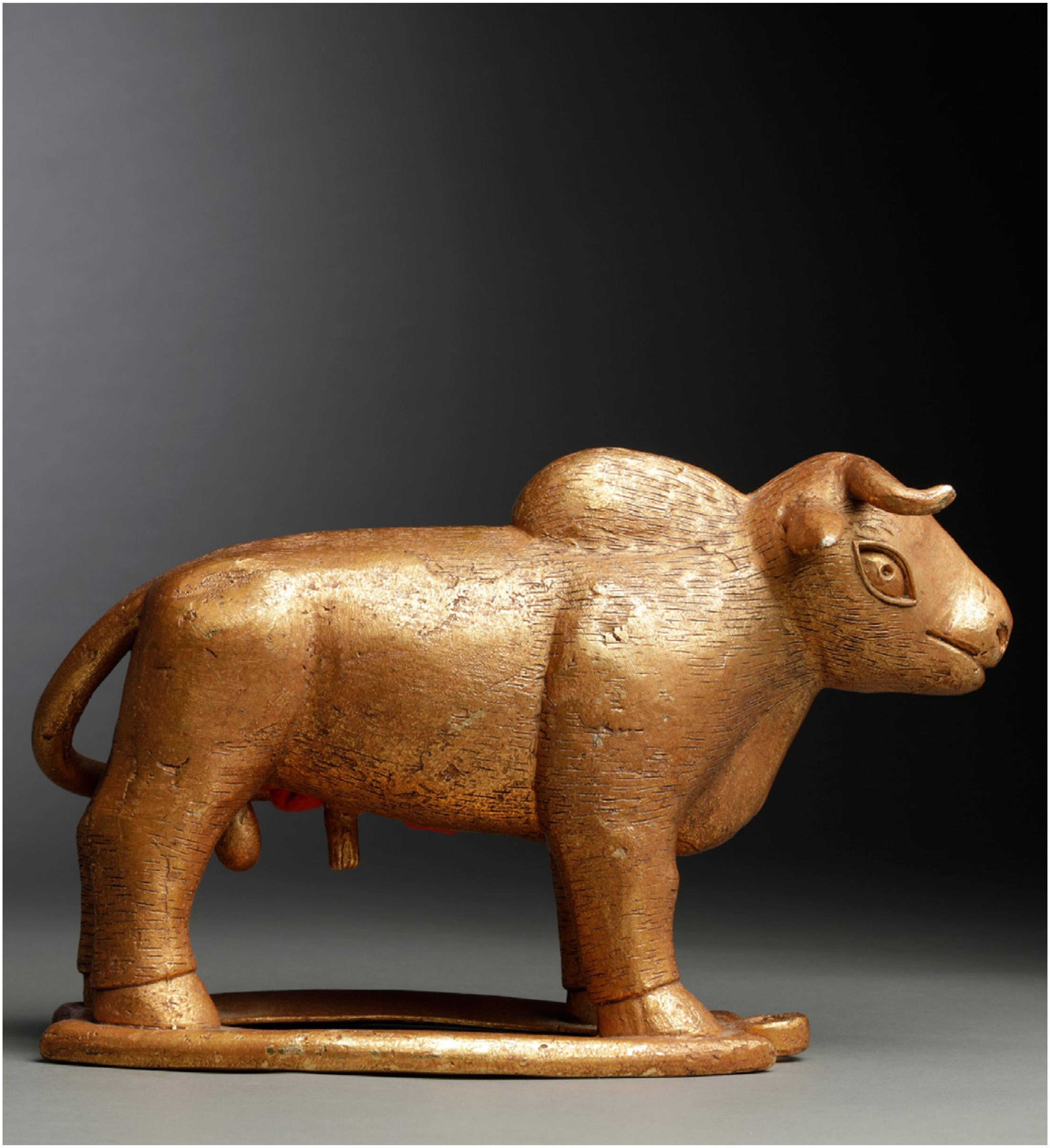
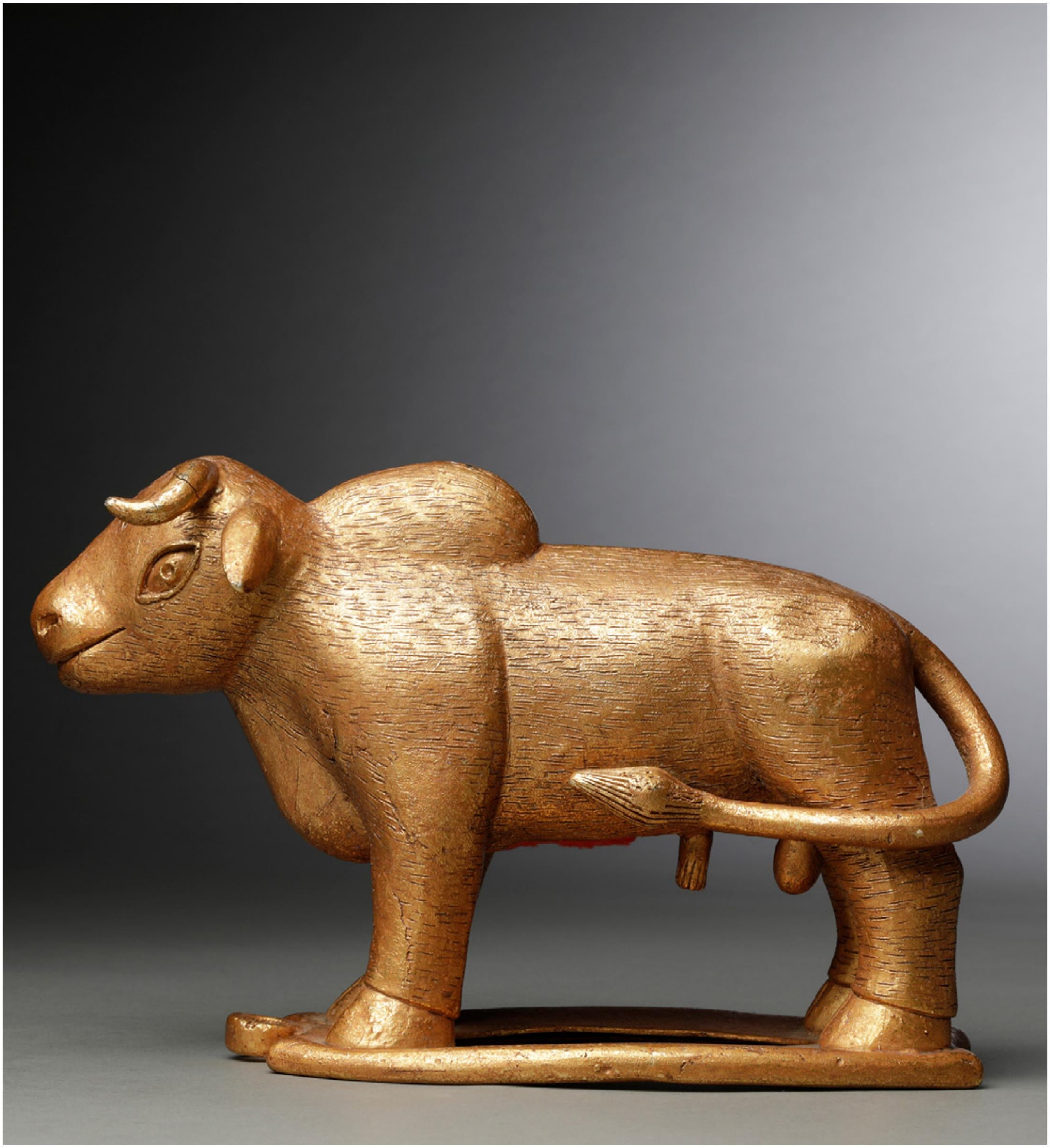
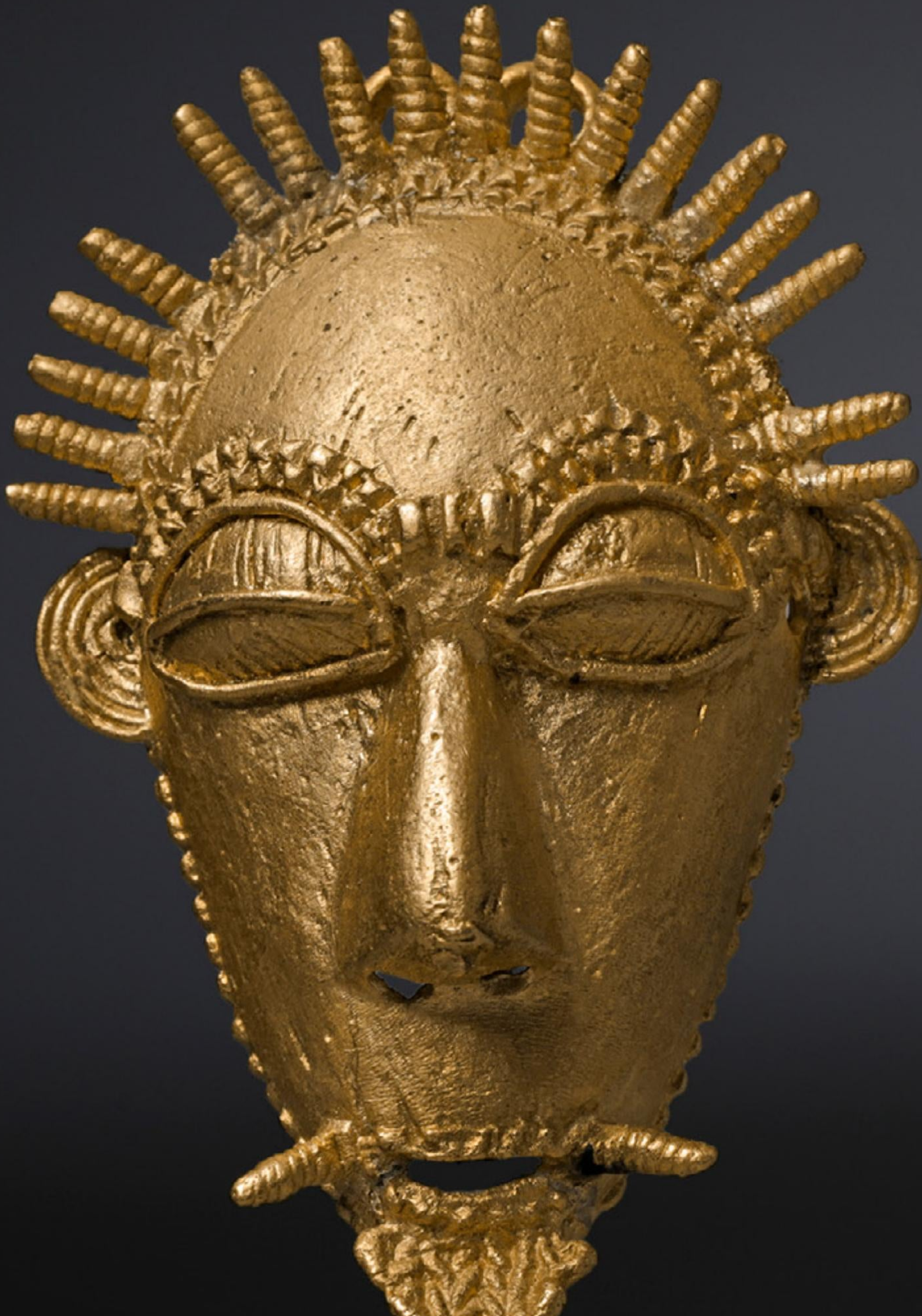
The image of the bull, as depicted in this ornament with its massive body, large head and thick legs, embodied many symbols that would be attributed to a respected leader. Physical strength and aggression were associated with martial and political power, fierce defense of the kingdom, and the resilience to overcome adversity. Cattle are a sign of wealth in agrarian societies and serve as an invocation of status. The common identification of the bull with virility and procreation also underscored a ruler's role in continuing the royal lineage.







19

# MALE HEAD PENDANT

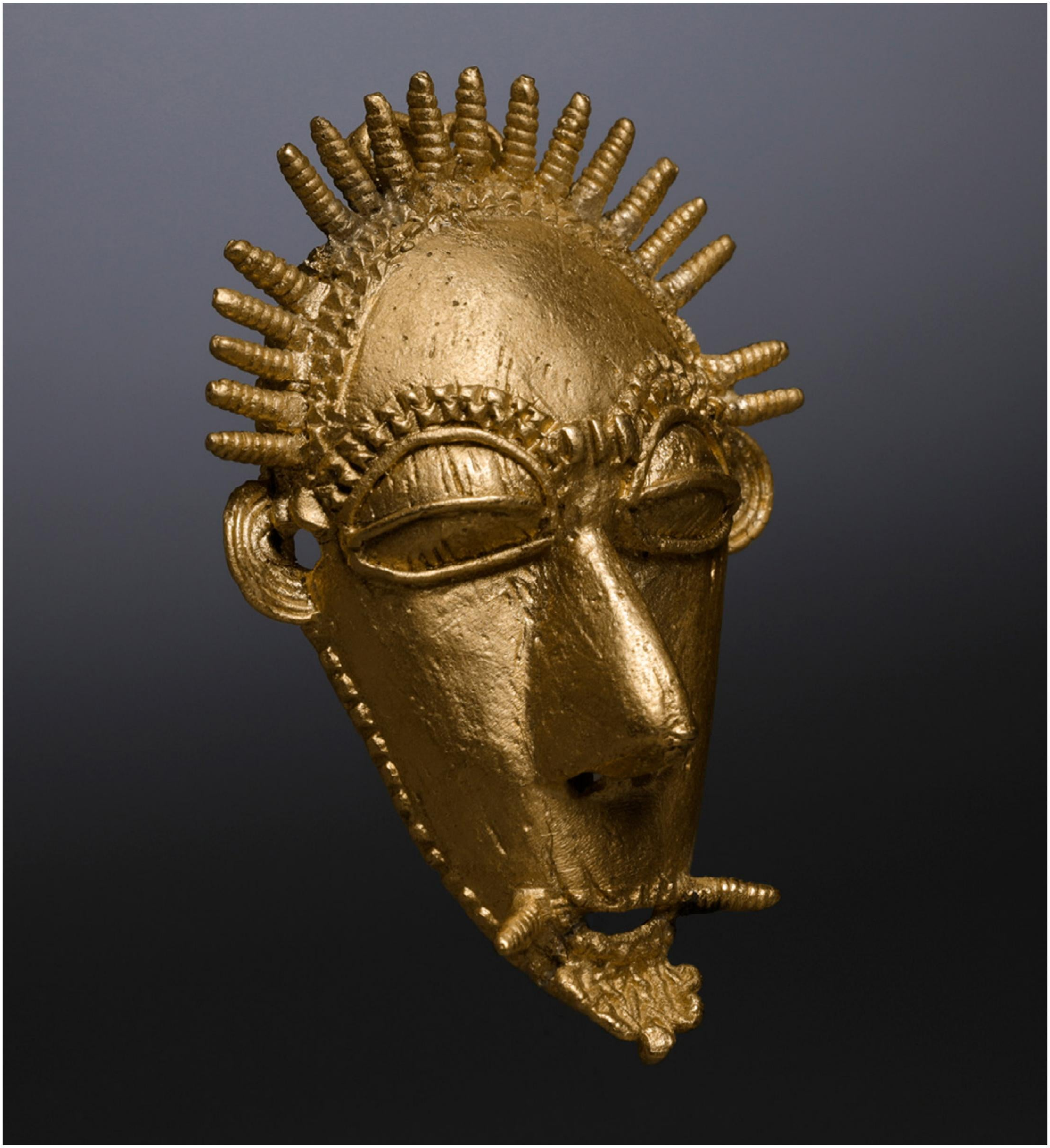
## AKAN, GHANA OR IVORY COAST

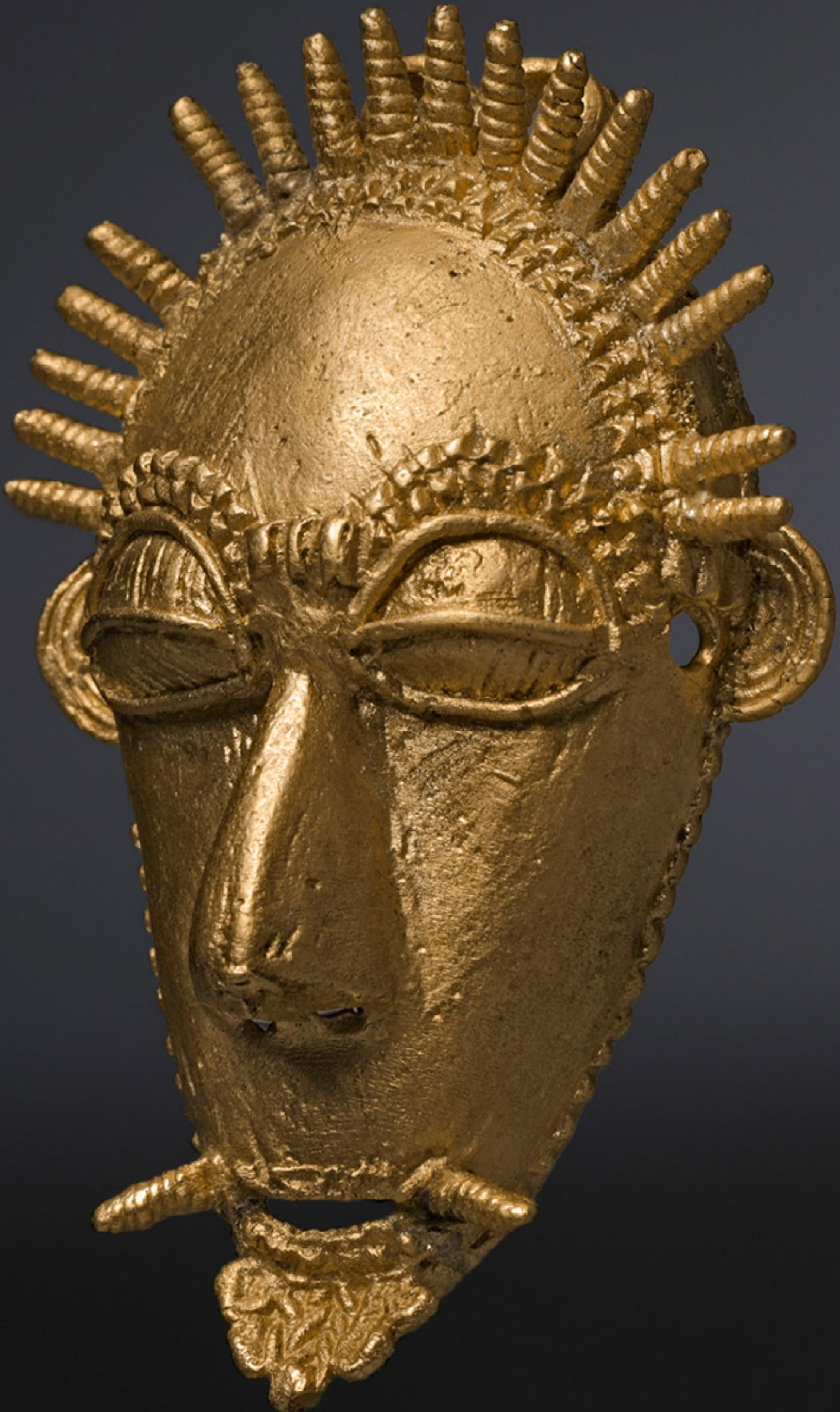
Second half 20th century
Gold
Height: 2 in, 5 cm

PROVENANCE
Philippe Ratton, Paris
Arte Primitivo, New York, June 2008
A distinguished private collection

Among the rich array of ornaments from the Gold Coast region, with its panoply of animal, human, and abstract imagery, we find a tradition of gold pendant masks. These small, detailed faces – some cast with the lost-wax method and others with more direct, hand-shaped techniques – represent the spirit of the wearer, a loved one, or an ancestor. They are worn during ceremonies and important occasions, such as weddings and religious gatherings, and are also credited with powers of protection, defending the wearer from wicked spirits and bringing good luck.

A vigorous energy radiates from this bright maskette, animated by its assertive, many-pointed silhouette and vibratory textures. An elongated face shows large, heavy-lidded eyes under arched and textured brows, and an oversized, triangular nose. The ears are rendered as semi-disks. Jutting in a semicircle from the head is a coiffure of tightly twisted cones that borders the face like a sunburst. The facial hair and beard echo it at the lower end of the mask. Both the warm brightness of the gold surface and the pointy tactility of the shapes at play create an immediate impact on the eye, lending this small piece an arresting aura.





## 20

# NECKLACE

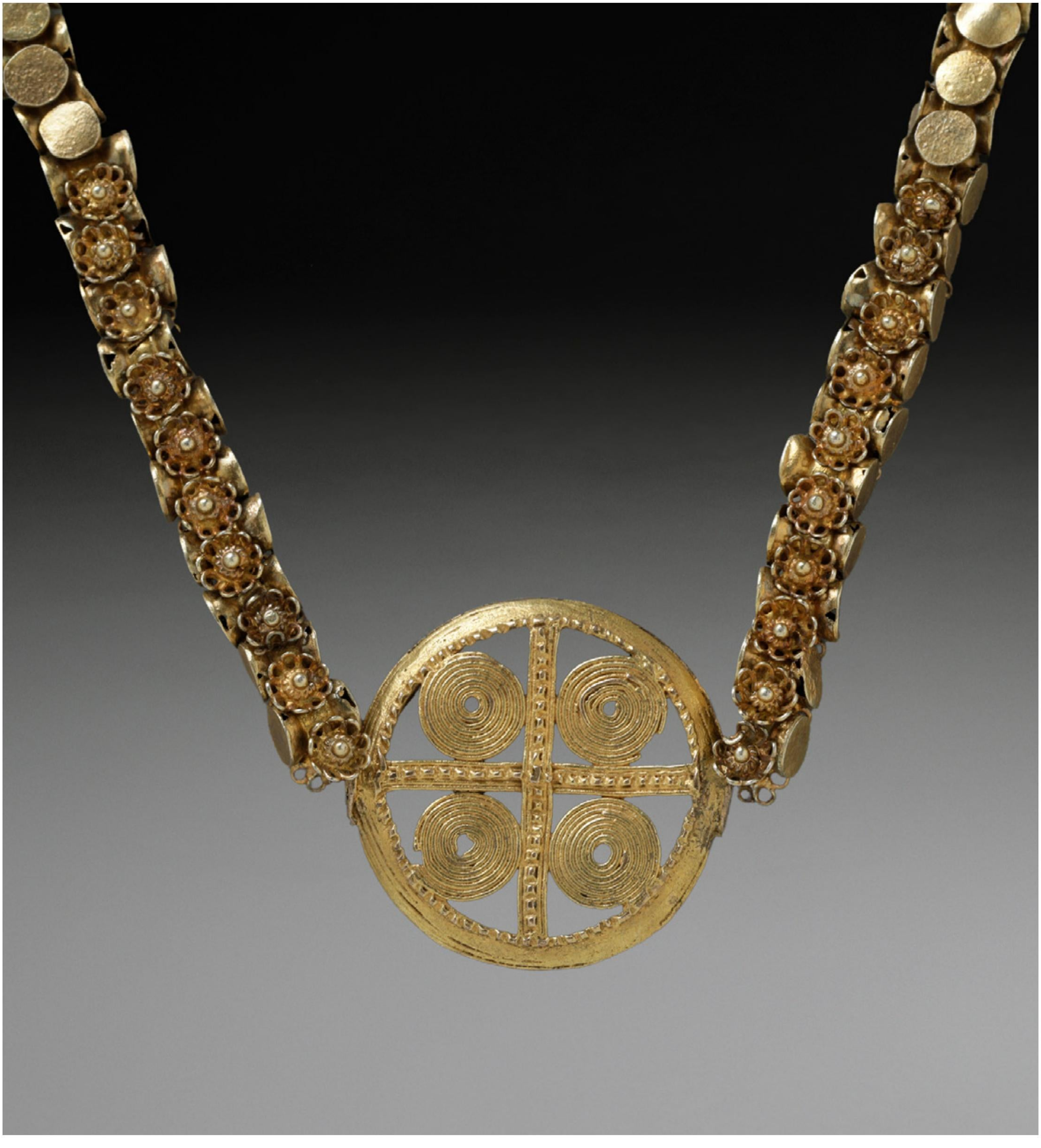
### AKAN, GHANA OR IVORY COAST

First half 20th century
Gold pendant, silver chain
Length: 23 in, 58 cm, Width of disk: 1 ¼ in, 3 cm

PROVENANCE
Niger Bend Gallery, Chittenango, New York, 2010
A distinguished private collection

A handsome Asante necklace with a circular, openwork gold pendant. The space within the ring is quartered by crossbars, and each quadrant is filled with a single floating spiral of tightly wound gold wire. A dense arrangement of flat-faced gold plugs and openwork rosettes encrust the chain, which would shift and shimmer with reflections when worn.

Asante gold necklaces featuring disk-shaped pendants, known as *akrafokonmu* or 'soul washer's disks,' are symbols of leadership, spirituality, and protection. These ornate gold discs are traditionally worn by rulers, queen mothers, and officials called *akrafo*, who perform rituals to cleanse leaders' souls. Intricate, radiating patterns are often worked into the faces of these disks, evoking the sun's life-giving energy and underscoring gold's association with the vital life force (*kra*).



21

# DISC WITH SNAKE AND LIZARD

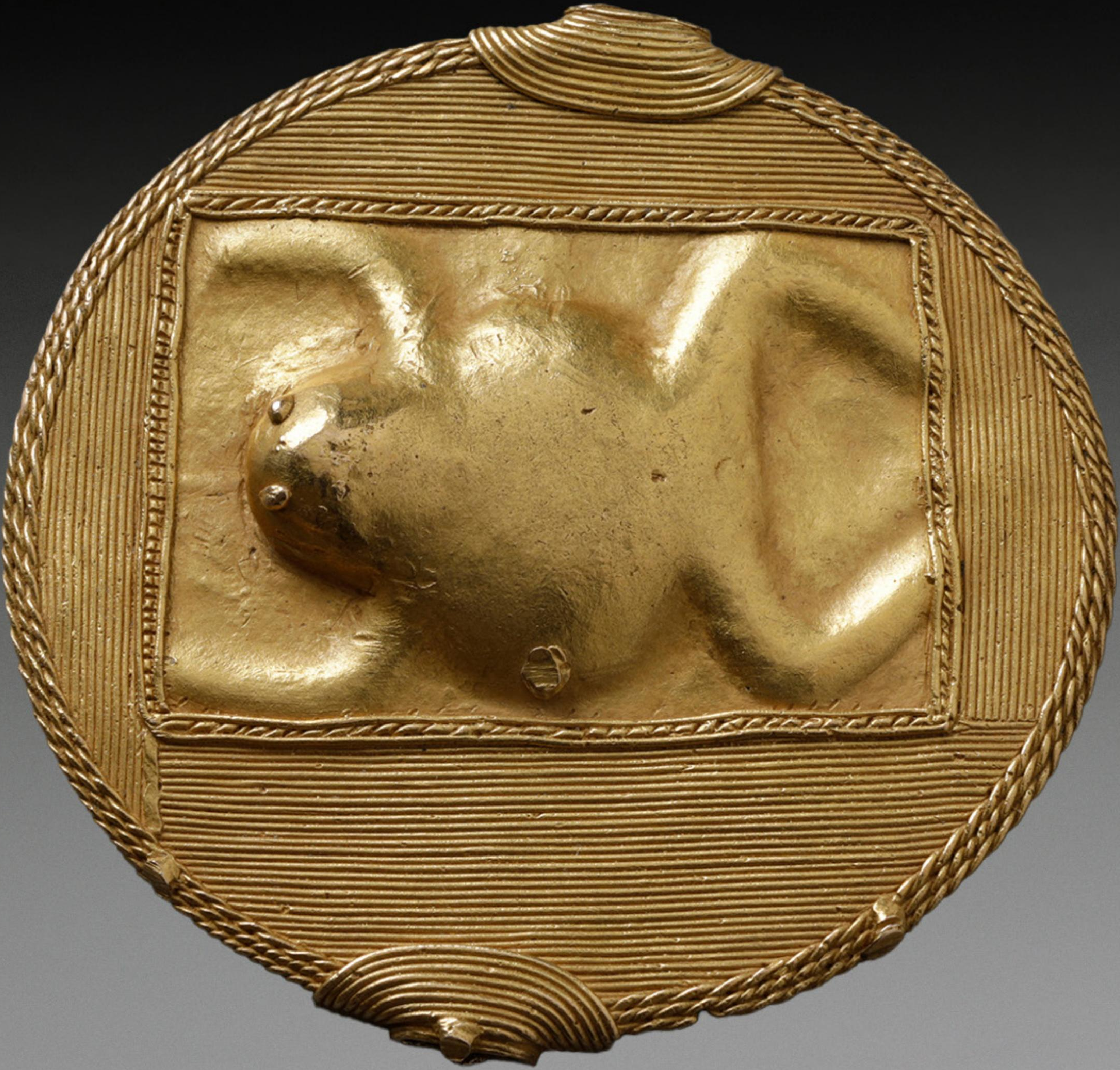
AKAN, GHANA OR IVORY COAST

First half 20th century
Copper
Height: 3 in, 7 ½ cm

PROVENANCE
Owen Hargreaves, London, 2010
A distinguished private collection

Asante necklaces featuring disk-shaped pendants, known as *akrafokonmu* or 'soul washer's disks,' are symbols of leadership, spirituality, and protection. These ornate discs are traditionally worn by rulers, queen mothers, and officials called *akrafo*, who perform rituals to cleanse leaders' souls. Intricate, radiating patterns are often worked into the faces of these disks, evoking the sun's life-giving energy and underscoring the metal's association with the vital life force (*kra*).

A compelling taste of the profound and eternal imbues this radiant disk pendant, which takes the form of a finely rolled spiral with openwork circumference. On this gently vibrating plane, reptile images settle as though sunning themselves, sharing the space with a central column over which the spiral pattern lies like a veil. This is a stunning piece of metalwork whose painstaking and flawless craftsmanship testifies to the mastery of the Asante artisans.



22

# DISC WITH FROG

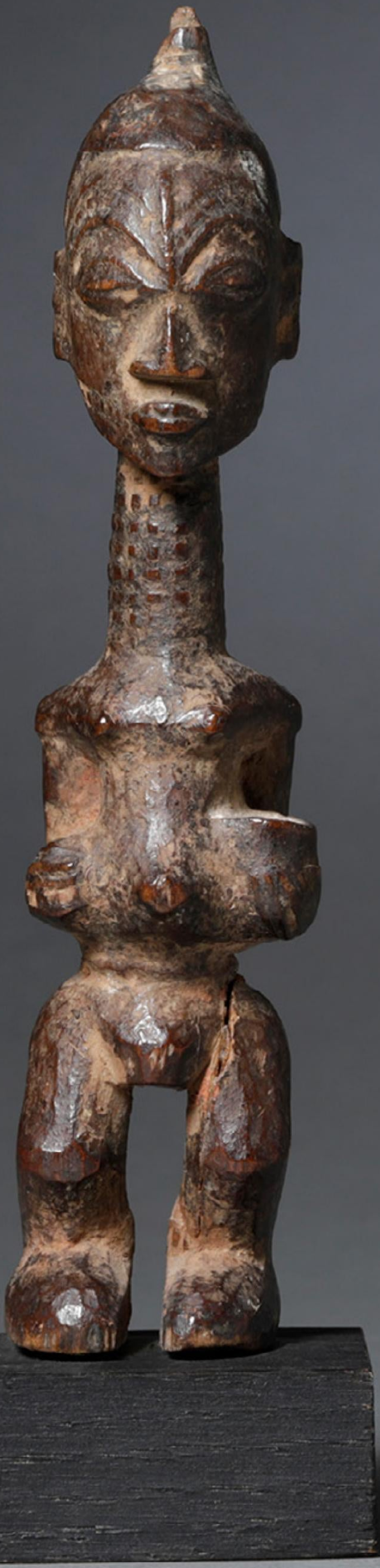
AKAN, GHANA OR IVORY COAST

First half 20th century
Gold alloy
Width: 3 in, 7 ½ cm

PROVENANCE
Owen Hargreaves, London, 2010
A distinguished private collection

A compelling Asante gold disc pendant with tight wirework patterning and a framed image of a frog executed in respoussé. The soft, handworked texture and blurred edges of the amphibian image create a striking contrast to the crisp and geometric framework, enhancing the qualities of both.

Ornaments of gold were reserved for the Asante elite. Carrying symbolism beyond wealth or status, they often referenced proverbs that affirmed the qualities of a virtuous and admirable leader. Many of these were embodied by animals from whom an insightful observer might take instruction. The frog was associated with many ideas: adaptation and versatility, based on its amphibious lifestyle; abundance and fertility, for its connections with rain and prodigious spawning; and a capacity for transformation, in its dramatic development from tadpole to adult.



23

# STANDING FIGURE *MBULENGA*

LULUA, DRC

Late 19th/early 20th century

Wood

Height: 6 ½ in, 16 ½ cm

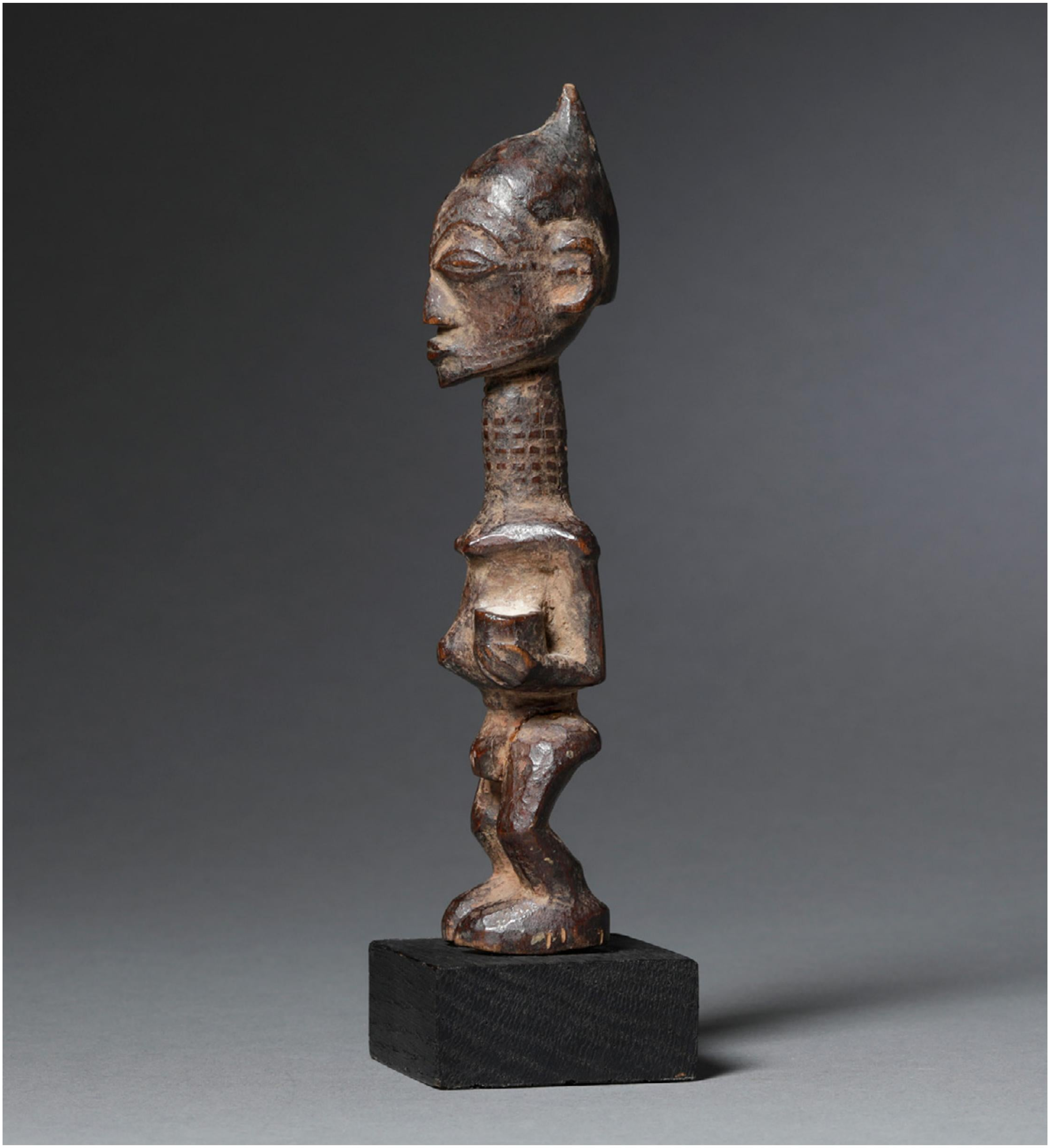
PROVENANCE

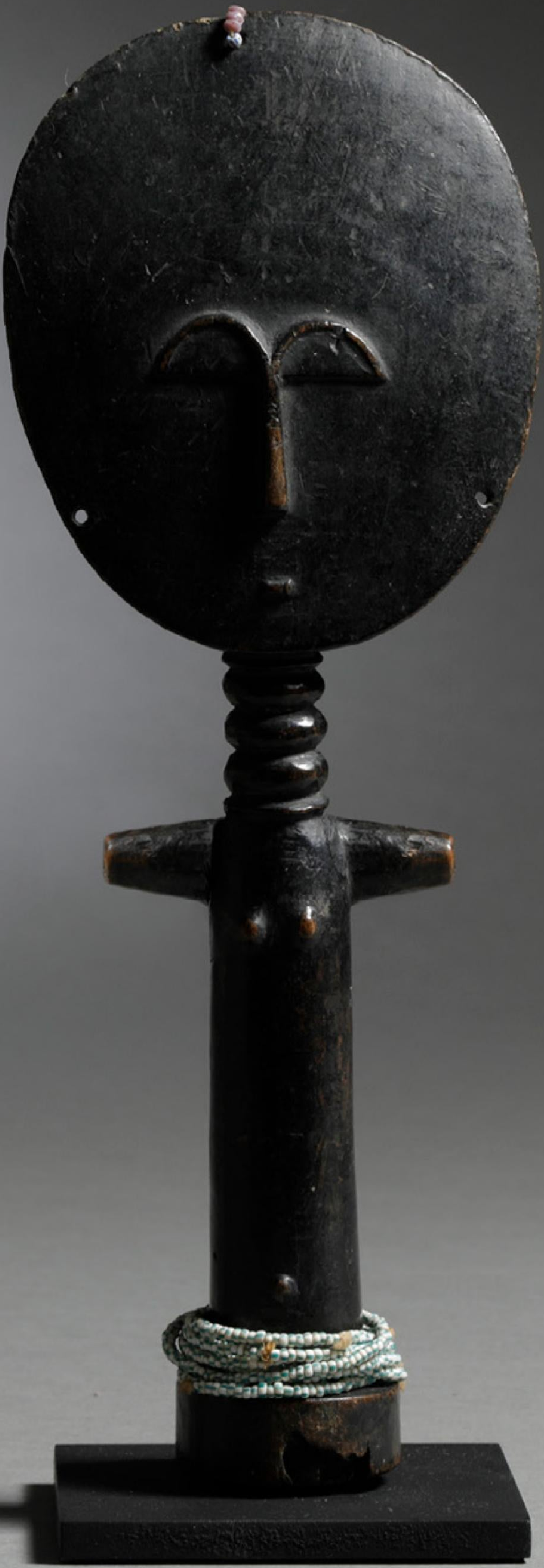
Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

Long-necked Lulua figures are used for a range of spiritual practices and are associated with ancestral spirits. Those supporting a vessel in one hand are called *mbulenga*, meaning 'for beauty, for good luck,' and cast protection over infants. Coated with the reddish-brown pigment of the camwood tree (*ngula*), these power figures present a stately posture, with a confident stance and large head perched atop an exaggerated neck. Their power resides in the contents of the vessel they carry, which could include the hair of a female albino, the bark of a sacred tree, and red tail feathers of a gray parrot.

The details that characterize Lulua figures reflect the same styles and cultural practices that living people employed in their time. One of these attributes is the scarification patterning that adorns the figures' bodies. In Lulua society, decorative scarification of one's body made an individual *bwimpe,* or beautiful – not just physically, but also morally. These raised patterns can be extensive, with dense motifs worked into the faces, necks, and torsos of some figures. The *ngula* pigment used to color these statues also mirrored Lulua beauty techniques, as they applied a vibrant tone to their bodies with a mixture of red earth, oil, and kaolin.

This example shows a vigorous posture with bent arms tucked against the body, thick bent legs, and a protruding umbilicus, which symbolizes inner power. The neck is quite long and emphasizes the size of the head, which is peaked with the 'horn' commonly found in these figures. Its face bears an imposing expression with arched eyebrows. Scarification patterns are found on the forehead, jawline, and neck. Traces of a white substance remain in the cup held in the figure's left hand.





24

# FEMALE FERTILITY FIGURE *AKUABA*

ASANTE, GHANA

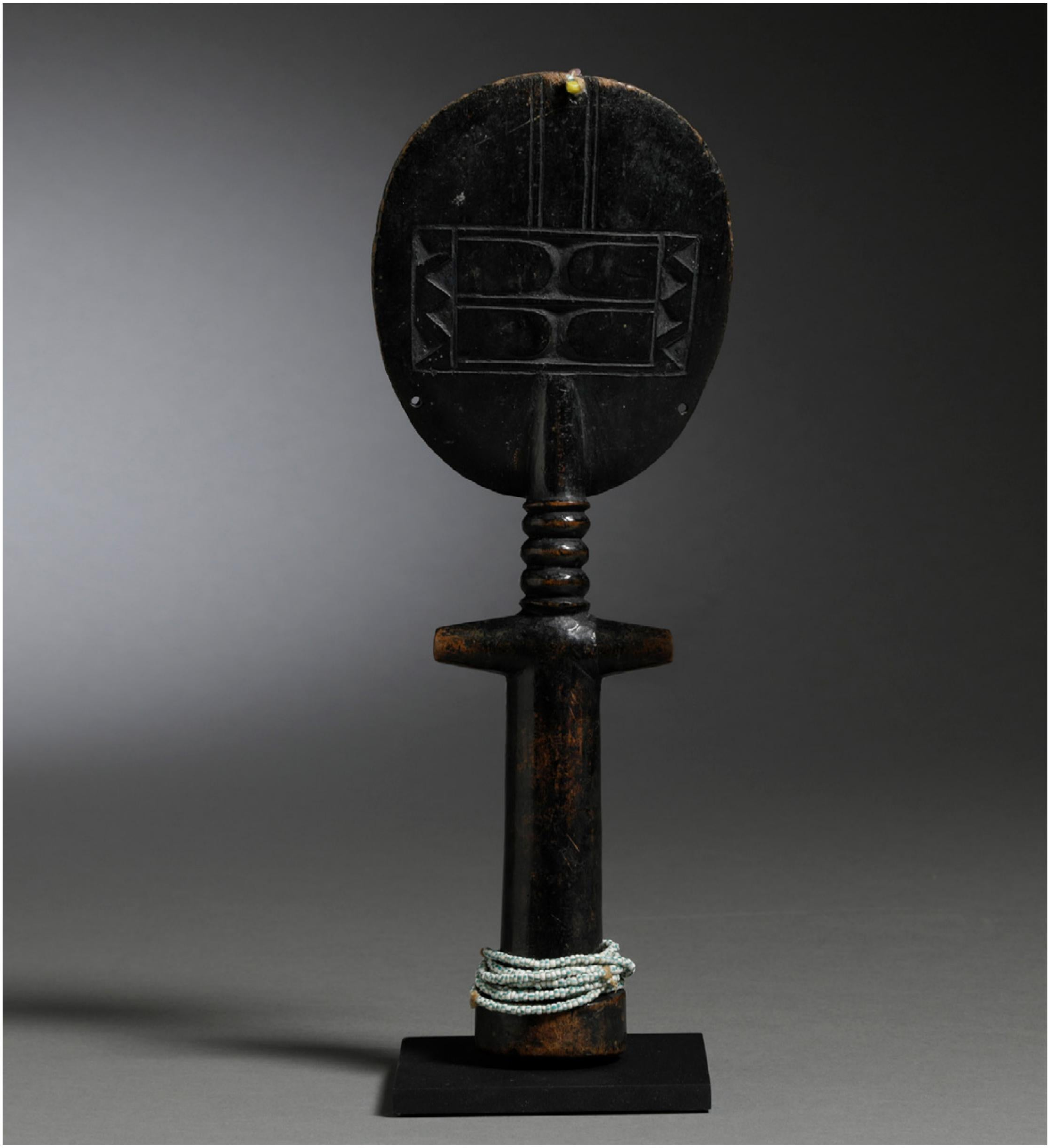
First half 20th century
Wood, glass beads
Height: 10 in, 25 cm

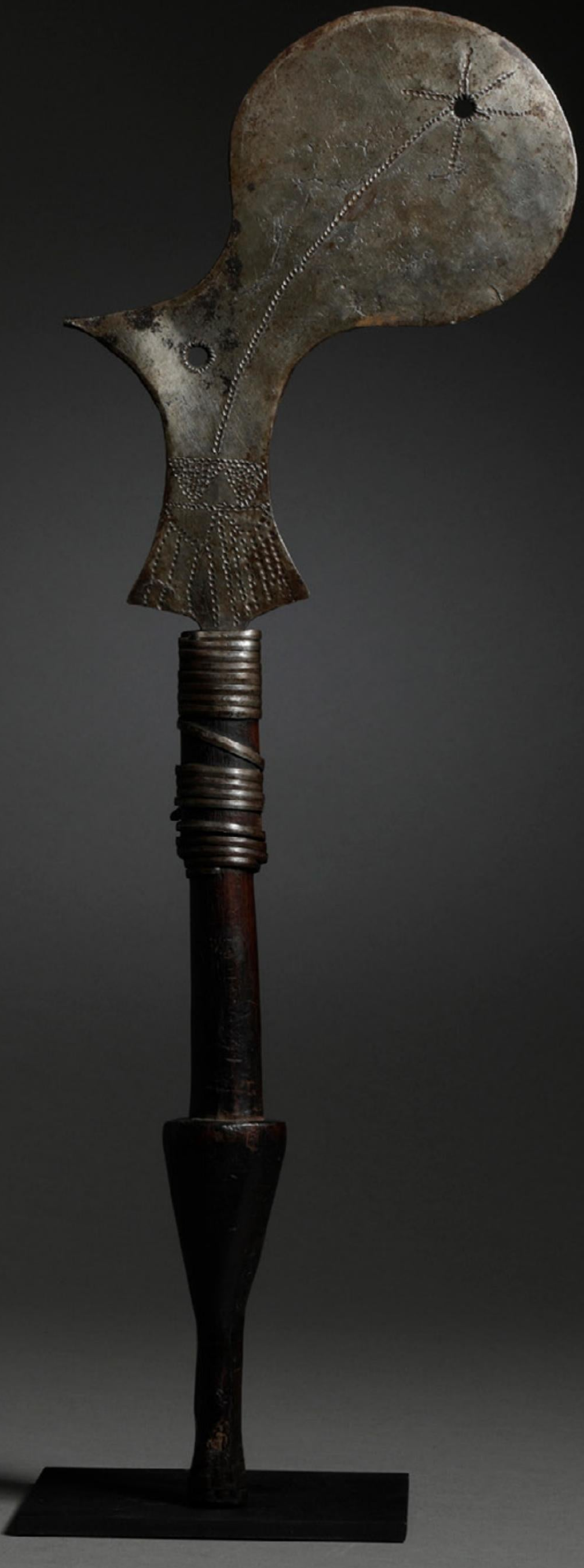
PROVENANCE
Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

Disk-headed *akuaba* figures are perhaps one of the most iconic forms in the African sculptural corpus. They are ritually consecrated images of children carried by aspiring mothers who wish to overcome barrenness and conceive through the power of community spirits. Their use arose from an ancestral legend about a woman named Akua who used such a figure for exactly this purpose. *Akuaba* ('Akua's child') are carried flat against the small of the back and wrapped in skirts, just as a human child would be. After aiding a successful pregnancy, the figures are placed in shrines in testament to the spirits' power, or kept by the family as a reminder of their child.

This fine *akuaba* shows the classic characteristics of its type, with a wide disk head, arched eyebrows and nose in relief, horizontal arms, and a cylindrical torso. The flat surface of the facial disk is quite sparingly detailed, focusing on the joined hook design that traces the nose and eyebrows. A neck of stacked rings suggests robust health and prosperity. Small, close-set breasts identify the figure as female, which *akuaba* invariably are. Beads wrap the base of the figure, and are also found in a small detail attachment at the very top of the head. The reverse side of the head is engraved with a handsome, semi-geometrical design.

Repair to one arm.





25

# PRESTIGE KNIFE *UGGO*

MOMVU, DRC

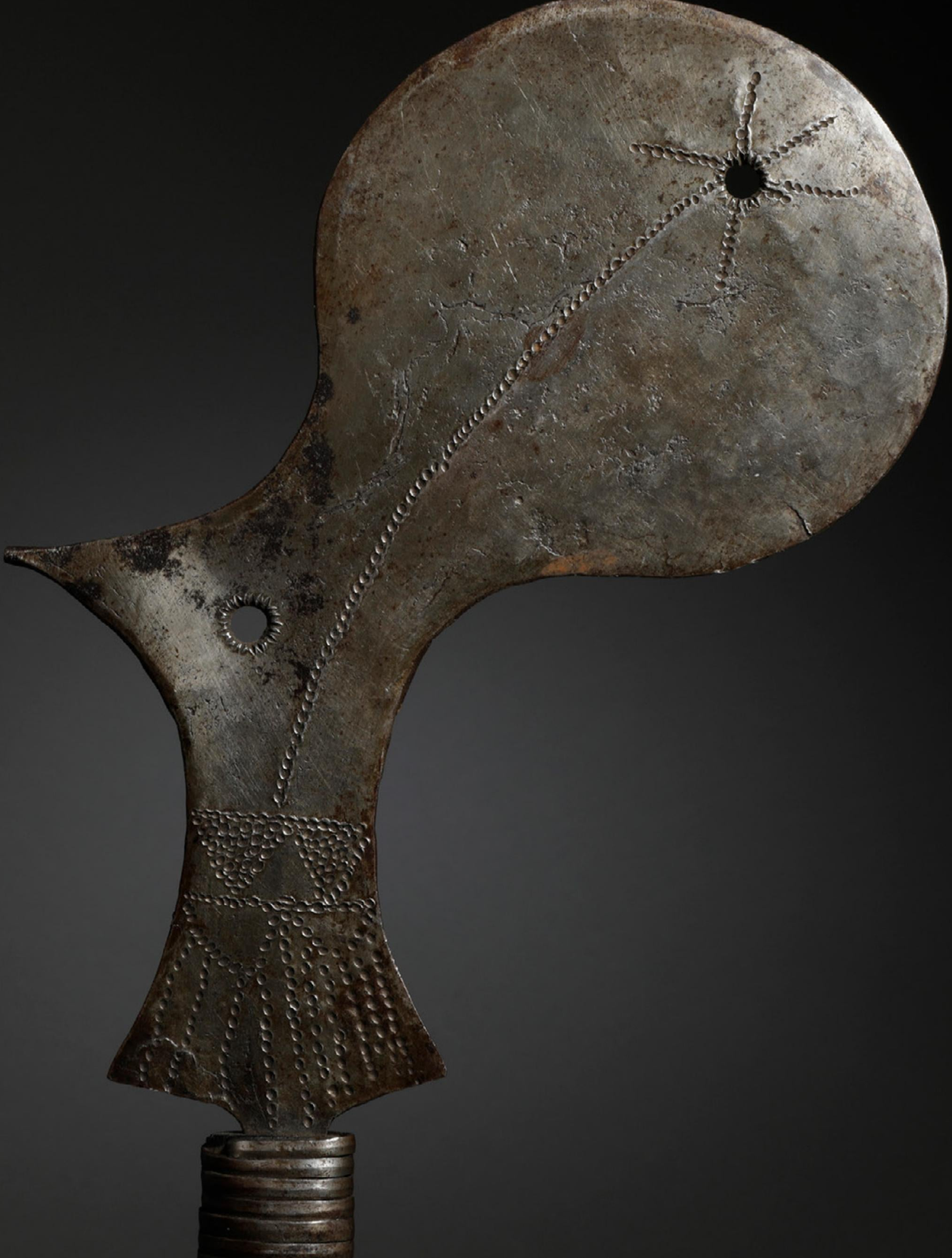
Late 19th/early 20th century
Wood, iron blade
Height: 22 in, 56 cm

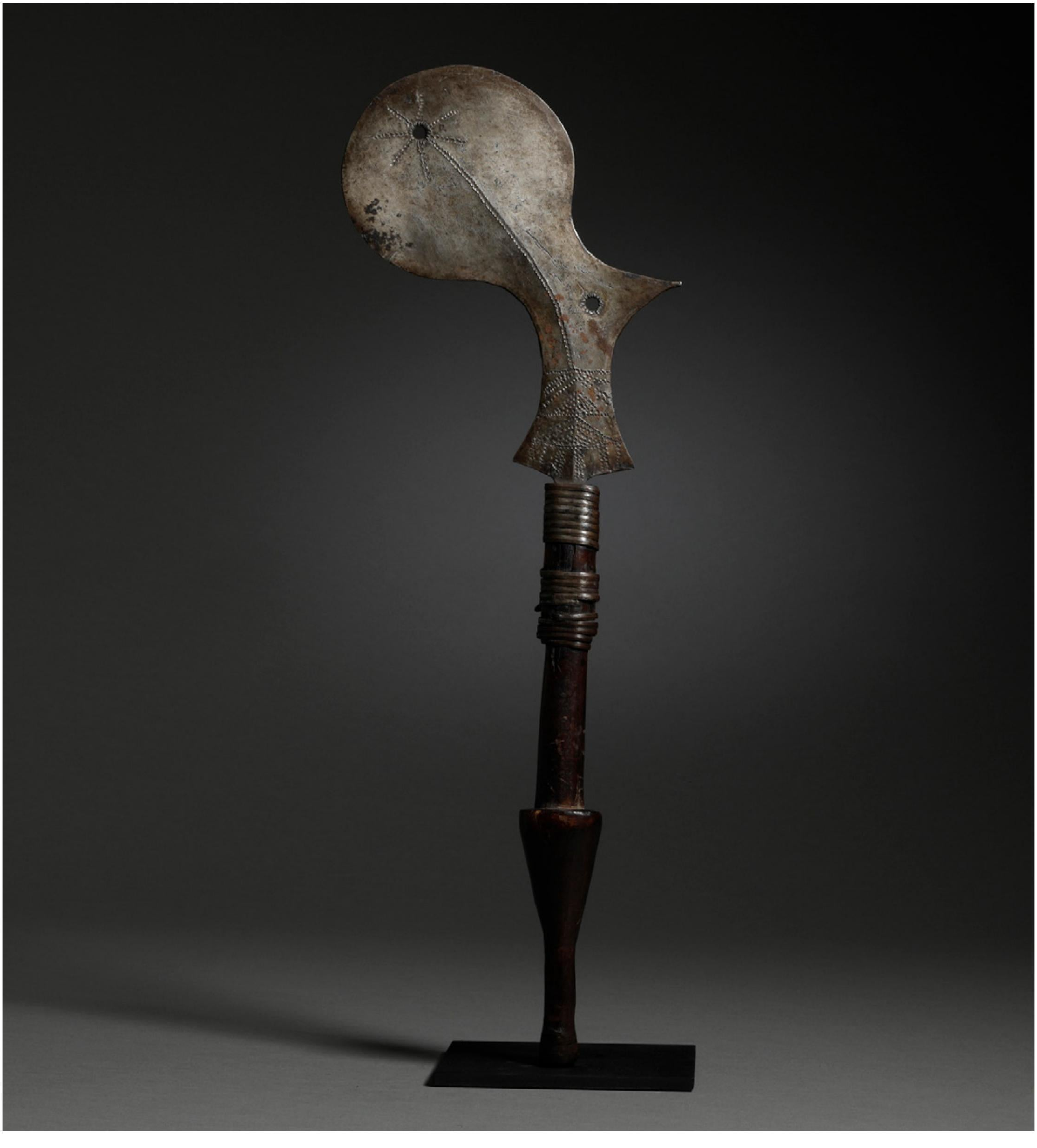
PROVENANCE

Roy and Sophie Sieber Collection

This remarkable asymmetrical blade (*uggo*) exemplifies the seemingly boundless creativity of African smiths who, over the centuries, produced a small universe of abstract and ceremonial weapons. Here a spirit of the sculptural more than the martial seems to hold sway. Beautiful linear designs are pitted into the pointed neck and leaning disc of the blade, along with two pierced holes, vaguely recalling astronomical phenomena. The throat of the haft is wrapped with thick metal wire, and an inverted conical expansion in the middle of the grip offers a stay for the hand.

Used as a status object by powerful women, the *uggo* originates predominantly from the Momvu, who live along the southern bank of the Maika River in northeastern Democratic Republic of the.Congo.





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